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THE LAST LETTERS OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE

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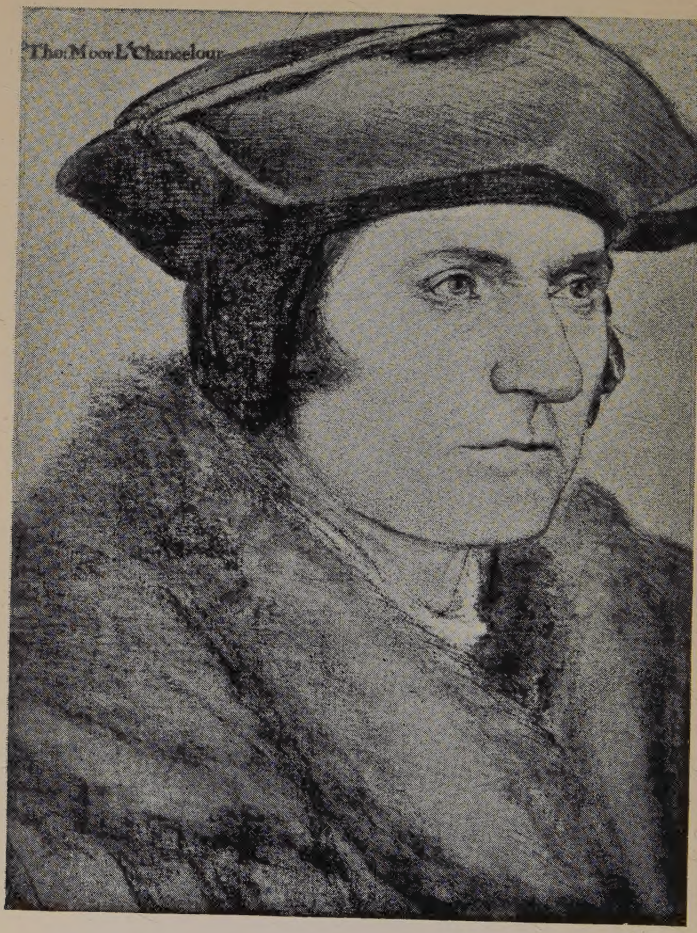

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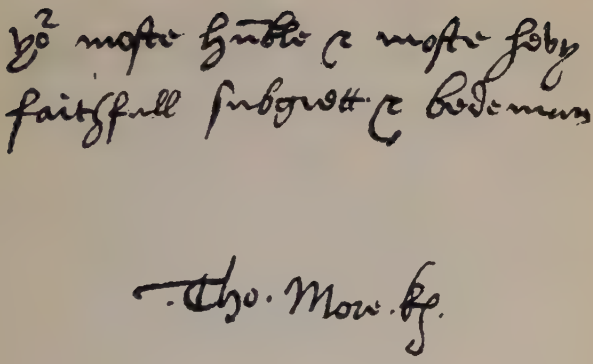

Your moste humble and moste hevy
faithfull subgiett and bedeman.

Tho. More K.

From Brit. Mus. Cott. Ms Cleo E vi. F 176.

SIR THOMAS MORE'S COAT-OF-ARMS

Illustration, representing the Coat-of-Arms belonging to Sir Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor, authenticated by the College of Heralds (June, 1924). "4ly, 1st and 4th, argent a chevron engrailed between 3 moorcocks sable; 2nd and 3rd, argent on a chevron between 3 unicorns' heads erased sable (not blazoned), 3 roundles (not blazoned)."

THE LAST LETTERS OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE

1478-1535

INTRODUCED BY

CARDINAL GASQUET, 1846-

AND EDITED WITH CONNECTING NARRATIVE BY

W. E. CAMPBELL

LONDON:
THE MANRESA PRESS
ROEHAMPTON, S.W.

1924

92
M 8137c

Nihil Obstat:

S. GEORGIUS CANONICUS
KIERAN HYLAND, S.T.D., Ph.D.

Imprimatur:

✠ PETRUS EPŪS SOUTHWARC.

11 Junii, 1924.

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IN RE INCERTA

FOREWORD BY THE GENERAL EDITOR

It was in 1914, before the Great War had begun, that Father (now Archbishop) Goodier set on foot THE CATHOLIC LIBRARY. His Grace as editor rapidly placed upon the market a number of small volumes containing old things and new, an alternation of original works with older writings now edited afresh, the whole being issued at the lowest possible price. In this way it was hoped that most Catholics would find it within their means to possess themselves of a valuable and instructive library. The hope has in good measure been realized; but the War itself eventually compelled suspension of the issue of fresh volumes, and the appointment of Father Goodier to the archdiocese of Bombay also compelled a change of editorship. Fortunately it does not appear to entail the complete cessation of His Grace's literary activity.

Now that it has been found possible to resume publication, it is no small consolation to be making a fresh start with *The Last Letters of Sir Thomas More*. History has yet to do him full justice as the greatest Englishman of his time, and a saintly man, saintly in a manner that accords remarkably with the national temperament, in his patient endurance of

bodily pains (*cf.* p. 54), in his sturdy yet mild resistance to the lustful despot, in the rich humour that sped him smiling to his Calvary. The blood of our martyrs must be prized more highly before it can take full effect; and few of them should have a deeper meaning for us than More.

His Eminence Cardinal Gasquet, in the introduction which he has graciously contributed to this volume, calls attention further to the literary significance of More's writings. From every point of view the massive greatness of the man impresses the beholder; nature and grace conspired to make him the choicest flower of his country's manhood, beloved of God and men.

C. LATTEY, S.J.

THE LAST LETTERS OF BLESSED SIR THOMAS MORE

THE life of Blessed Thomas More is so well known that it may almost rank as a national possession. But the literary side of his career is all too little known at first hand. The one complete edition of his English Works, published in 1557, is rare and expensive, it is printed in Black Letter type, and is very largely composed of controversial works that have not as yet recommended themselves to supposedly unprejudiced historians. It is therefore a clear duty to rescue them from oblivion. More's Works must necessarily rank high in the scale of historical evidence—evidence which has long been needed to correct the severely anti-Catholic bias of much English historical writing.

The editor of " The Catholic Library " has therefore determined to issue in that series as many volumes as possible of More's English works. And it has been thought advisable to make a beginning with this small volume of *Last Letters*.

In order that the character, the pathos, the spirituality and the historical importance of these Letters may be better appreciated, it has been thought well to blend with them a context which will sufficiently supply the information necessary thereto. The Letters themselves are rendered into modern

spelling, wherever the original spelling may seem unintelligible; but no substantial change has been made in their original form.

The short prefaces to the separate letters are, of course, in the original edition of 1557.

The period covered by these extends from Feb. 1st, 1534, until July 5th, 1535, the eve of Blessed Thomas More's martyrdom. The "secret matter" of Henry VIII.'s divorce, his passion for Anne Boleyn, and the ever widening differences with the Holy See which resulted from it, had, in so far as they affected More himself, brought about his resignation of the Lord Chancellorship and a gradual estrangement from his royal master. After his resignation he lived in retirement and occupied himself with his religious writings against Tyndal and Frith. He avoided the Court and, in June 1533, refused an invitation to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn. "At Christmas of the same year the council issued a proclamation attacking the pope, and justifying Henry VIII.'s action in divorcing Queen Catherine." William Rastell, More's nephew, then issued a pamphlet in which he defended the pope, and More himself was at once suspected of having inspired it. In the first letter of our series, he writes to Thomas Cromwell denying the suspicion.

INTRODUCTION

BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL GASQUET

I AM glad to welcome this reprint of the last letters of Blessed Sir Thomas More, with the necessary explanatory and connecting narrative. To my thinking it has long been a standing disgrace to English scholarship that the writings of this celebrated Humanist of the sixteenth century should have been so entirely neglected. His English works, from which most of the letters now reprinted have been taken, exist only in William Rastell's edition of 1557. Consequently, they may be said to be practically unknown to all except the fortunate possessors of this rare and very costly volume.

I think it may not unfairly be conjectured that the neglect of the works of this eminent English pre-Reformation scholar is deliberate. How otherwise can such negligence be explained? Sir Thomas More was considered, at least abroad, and by the best judges for two centuries after his death, as undoubtedly the brightest ornament of the English learning of his age. Probably, then, this modern neglect of his writings may be best accounted for by his known and strong opposition to the principles of the sixteenth century reformers. More never minced matters when a question of the Catholic Faith

arose; and a large portion of the great volume of his English works is occupied by his defence of the religion of his forefathers against the attacks of the new religious teachers. Except for this, I cannot conceive why this undoubtedly great writer should have been left so long in obscurity. His English style, alone, is worthy of study, his writing abounds in wit and humour, and especially, in that part of it which is controversial, with a homely vigour and directness that was new to our vernacular prose.

I presume that no one will question his scholarship and pre-eminent position. At Oxford, as a youth, he formed a lasting friendship with Thomas Linacre and William Grocyn, who had lately returned to England from Italy. From the former he received his earliest teaching in Greek, and his intimacy with the latter led subsequently to an invitation to lecture on St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* at the church of St. Lawrence, Jewry, of which Grocyn was Rector. Erasmus tells us that by hard work More had come to write fluently an easy and harmonious Latin prose. Through his Oxford tutors he was introduced to Colet, the famous Dean of St. Paul's, who later became his confessor, or as he styles him, "the director of his life."

With Erasmus, the foremost scholar of the age, he formed a close and warm friendship, which continued during life. The opinion formed by that distinguished scholar of the attainments of his English

friend are not open to doubt; and when More was executed, he lamented the destruction of one of the greatest lights of his age.

In my opinion, Professor Phillimore[1] is amply justified in his assertion that the Humanist movement in England was arrested by the death of Sir Thomas More, and the religious revolution which followed it, until the time of Dryden, more than a century later. The movement, this writer considers, was typically personified in More and paralyzed by his death. Mr. Herbert Fisher has said practically the same thing in the following words: "The torch, once lit, burned brilliantly for a generation, until it was quenched by the bitter waters of religious strife."

The verdict of Dr. Johnson upon the English writings of More is a valuable testimony to their importance. "Of the works of Sir Thomas More," he writes in his Introduction to his Dictionary, "it was necessary to give a larger specimen, both because our language was then in a great degree formed and settled, and because it appears from Ben Jonson that his works were considered as models of pure and elegant style." He then devotes seven pages, a quarter of the whole space given, to an historical review of the English language, to illustrative quotations from More's writings.

In the light of such evidence it is all the more regrettable that writings so important to an adequate understanding of the growth of our English

[1] *The Dublin Review*, July, 1913.

vernacular should have suffered so long a neglect.

And in this connection it will be of interest to understand somewhat More's own religious point of view when writing his tracts and treatises, especially as his attitude to the Reformation would seem to have prevented their re-publication after the triumph of the "New Learning."

The late Dr. James Gairdner has grasped the inward meaning of the change introduced in the government of the Christian Church by the assertion of the Royal Supremacy by Henry VIII., and the consequent heroic resistance of Sir Thomas More to the measure of Parliament which enacted it. The whole of what this great authority has to say about this matter may be read with profit, because it contains much clear thinking founded upon fact. Here it is possible to give a mere outline of the argument.

In the sixteenth century there were, undoubtedly, two jurisdictions, separate and recognized by all, upon which the social system then in existence was based. In England, as in every other country, the King was the head of the civil jurisdiction, the Pope the head of the ecclesiastical. As there was one faith in all Christendom so there was one recognized chief ruler in spiritual matters. In the West, his supreme authority was undisputed until the days of Luther and Henry VIII. "Luther," writes Dr. Gairdner, "defied the Papal authority because, unfortunately, he had been treated unfairly [as he contended] by

Papal authority; but Henry VIII. had no such excuse. Towards the King of England no Pope had been guilty of injustice, least of all Clement VII. His fault was rather in conceding favours which ought not to have been conceded; and the King repaid him with threats if he would not concede even more."[1]

Now Henry knew well that to carry out these threats would be "to endanger the peace and quiet of his own kingdom, but urged on by a mad passion he would not be withheld from doing so." And now we can understand the position of Sir Thomas More, and how it came about that his conscience forced him to resist the will of Henry even to death. "More saw," continues Dr. Gairdner, "what was at stake and endeavoured, so far as he could, to save the King from the effects of his own recklessness. But his chief aim was to save religion itself from insult, and public morals and social order from being subverted by the perversity of heretics." Surely no nobler aim can be imagined; and so the greatest man in the kingdom went to the scaffold to uphold the supremacy of the Pope in matters Spiritual.

It must be remembered that until this act of Henry VIII., England had not been much troubled with Lutherans, and according to the opinion of Dr. Gairdner, except for sporadic cases of other heresies, there

[1] *Lollardy and the Reformation*, vol. i. p. 509; cf. also *A History of the English Church in XVI. Century*. London: Macmillan, 1902.

had been nothing to disturb the religious stability of the country till Tyndale's Testament began to be diffused at the beginning of 1526. "There is no reason to suppose," wrote Dr. Brewer, the best equipped and most disinterested historian of the period between 1509 and 1530, "that the nation as a body was discontented with the old religion. Facts point to the opposite conclusion. . . . To imagine that ploughmen and shepherds in the country read the New Testament in English by stealth under the hedges, or that smiths and carpenters, in the towns, poured over its pages in the corners of their masters' workshops, is to mistake the character and acquirements of the age. . . . Long down into the reign of Elizabeth, according to the testimony of a modern historian, the old Faith still numbered a majority of adherents in England."[1]

And from the English Works of Sir Thomas More we may learn at first hand about the controversies of these times, and see how little any heretical teaching had subverted the traditional faith of Englishmen until, to carry out his intention of marrying Anne Boleyn at all costs, the King struck at the spiritual authority of the Pope, who in the name of Christian morality opposed the royal whim.

Nor is it without use to be reminded, again by Dr. Gairdner, who succeeded Dr. Brewer in arranging and

[1] *The Reign of Henry VIII.*, vol. ii. pp. 468—70.

publishing the State records of this period, "that heresy, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, was still" (what he has shown Lollardy to have been in the fifteenth) "not by any means a 'higher criticism' impugning biblical and Church authority by the use of reason; but really a sort of biblical superstition exalting the written word over human reason and Church authority alike. It was the belief of 'known men' (the new and subversive teachers) in their own infallibility as the interpreters of Holy Writ, and the treatment of human reason as the enemy of the faith that made these zealots think themselves superior to all exterior authority whatever." (*Op. cit.* Vol. I. pp. 516-7.)

Readers of this brief Introduction will know already the story of More's life, "how wise, how eloquent, how learned, how honourable a judge and magistrate he was: how loving a husband, how careful a father, how sweet a friend, how zealous against heretics, and in life how saintly and holy he was."

"But," to continue the quotation from Nicholas Harpsfield, "the chiefest thing, and the most memorable and worthy to be written in letters of gold is this: that Sir Thomas More, for the defence of justice and veritie, most gladlie and willingly offered himself to death."

And these *Last Letters* are truly golden; for were they not written by More himself, and do they not

give us the authentic record of the last heroic end of that great man's life on earth?

Therefore, I wish God-speed to this little volume which makes them publicly available. And I hope that its wide circulation may encourage the early publication of the remaining works of Blessed Sir Thomas More.

A. CARD. GASQUET.

Rome, May 1924.

LIST OF LETTERS

	PAGE
More to Cromwell, 1st Feb., 1534	1
More to Cromwell, circ. Feb., 1534	4
More to Elizabeth Barton, circ. 1526	11
More to Cromwell, circ. 21st Feb., 1534	17
More to Henry VIII., Feb. or March, 1534	18
More to Cromwell, Feb. or March, 1534	23
More to Margaret Roper, circ. 18th April, 1534	36
More to Margaret Roper, circ. April, 1534	44
More to Margaret Roper, circ. May, 1534	46
Margaret Roper to More, circ. May, 1534	48
More to his friends, circ. May, 1534	50
Lady Alington to Margaret Roper, Aug., 1534	51
Margaret Roper to Lady Alington, circ. Aug., 1534	54
More to Nicholas Wylson, 1534	80
More to Nicholas Wylson, 1534	81
Margaret Roper to More, 1534	89
More to Margaret Roper, 1534	90
More to Margaret Roper, 1534	97
More to Leder, a priest, 16th Jan., 1535	102
More to Margaret Roper, 2nd or 3rd May, 1535	103
More to Margaret Roper, 7th May, 1535	108
More to Anthony Bonvisi, circ. June, 1535	114
More to Margaret Roper, 5th July, 1535	118

LAST LETTERS OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE

I.

A letter written by Sir Thomas More to Master Thomas Cromwell (then one of the king's Privy Council) first day of february in the year of our Lord God, 1534. After the computation of the Church of England and in the xxv year of the reign of King Henry VIII.

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL in my most hearty wise I recommend me unto you. Sir, my cousin William Rastall hath informed me, that your mastership of your goodness showed him, that it hath been reported, that I have against the book of certain articles (which was late put forth in print by the king's honourable Council) made an answer and delivered it unto my said cousin to print. And albeit that he for his part truly denied it, yet because he somewhat remained in doubt whether your mastership gave therein full credence or not, he desired me for his further discharge to declare you the very truth. For as help me God neither my said cousin nor any man else, never had any book of mine to print, one or other, since the said book of the King's Council came forth. For of truth the last book that he printed of mine was that book that I made against an unknown heretic which hath sent over a work that walketh in over many men's hands named the Supper of the Lord,

against the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. My answer whereunto albeit that the printer (unaware to me) dated it anno 1534. By which it seemeth to be printed since the feast of the Circumcision, yet was it of very truth both made and printed and many of them gone before Christmas. And myself never espied the printer's oversight in the date in more than three weeks after. And this was in good faith the last book that my cousin had of mine which being true as the truth it shall be found, sufficeth for his declaration in this behalf.

As touching mine own self, I shall say this much farther, that on my faith I never made any such book nor never thought to do. I read the said book once over and never more. But I am for once reading very far off from many things whereof I would have metely sure knowledge ever I would make an answer, though the matter and the book both, concerned the poorest man in the town, and were of the simplest man's making too. For of many things which in that book be touched, in some I know not the law, and some I know not the fact. And therefore would I never be so childish nor so play the proud arrogant fool, by whomsoever the book had been made, and to whomsoever the matter had belonged, as to presume to make an answer to the book, concerning the matter whereof I never were sufficiently learned in the laws, nor fully instructed in the facts. And while the matter pertaineth unto the king's highness, and the book professeth openly that it was made by his honourable Council, and by them put in print with his grace's license obtained there-

unto, I verily trust in good faith that of your good mind towards me, though I never wrote you word thereof, yourself will both think and say so much for me, that it were a thing far unlikely, that answer should be made thereunto by me. I will by the grace of Almighty God, as long as it shall please him to lend me life in this world, in all such places (as I am of my duty to God and the king's grace bound) truly say my mind, and discharge my conscience, as becometh a poor honest true man, wheresoever I shall be by his grace commanded. Yet surely if it should happen any book to come abroad in the name of his grace or his honourable Council, if that book to me seemed such as myself would not have given mine own advice to the making, yet I know my bounden duty to bear more honour to my prince, and more reverence to his honourable Council, than that it could become me for many causes, to make an answer out of such a book or to counsel and advise any man else to do it.

And therefore as it is a thing I never did nor intended, so I heartily beseech you if you shall happen to perceive any man, either of evil will or of lightness, any such thing report by me, be so good master to me, as help to bring us both together. And then never take me for honest man after, but if ye find his honesty somewhat impaired in the matter.

Thus am I bold upon your goodness to encumber you with my long rude letter, in the contents whereof, I eftsoons heartily beseech you to be in manner aforesaid, good master and friend unto me: whereby you shall bind me to be your bedesman while I live: as

knoweth our Lord, whose especial grace both bodily and ghostly long preserve and keep you. At Chelsea in the vigil of the Purification of our Blessed lady. By the hand of assuredly all your own, Thomas More, Knight.

Though nothing further was heard of this trouble, it was hardly likely that Anne Boleyn would forgive More for the way in which he had slighted her. About this time, Elizabeth Barton, a nun of Canterbury whose pretensions to holiness had been seriously advertised, thought fit to indulge in persistent denunciations of the King on account of the divorce. Now More, with many other important people of the time, had corresponded with her; and this fact was seized upon by Cromwell as a means of incrimination. But there was too little evidence to go upon, as More's own letter of explanation shows, a letter which is not included in the *English Works*.

II.

Sir Thomas More to Thomas Cromwell.

Right Worshipful,—After my most hearty recommendation, with thanks for your goodness, in accepting of my rude, long letter, I perceive, that of your further goodness and favour towards me, it liked your mastership, to break with my son Roper, of that, that I had had communication not only with divers that were of acquaintance with the lewd nun of Canterbury, but also with herself; and had, over that, by my writing, declaring favour towards her, given her advice and counsel; of which my demeanour, that it

liketh you to be content to take the labour and the pain to hear, by mine own writing, the truth, I very heartily thank you, and reckon myself therein right deeply beholden to you.

It is, I suppose, about eight or nine years ago since I heard of that housewife first; at which the Bishop of Canterbury that then was (God assoil his soul) sent unto the king's grace a roll of paper, in which were written certain words of hers, that she had, as report was then made, at sundry times spoken in her trances; whereupon it pleased the king's grace to deliver me the roll, commanding me to look thereon, and afterwards show him what I thought therein. Whereunto, at another time, when his highness asked me, I told him, that in good faith I found nothing in these words that I could anything regard or esteem; for seeing that some part fell in rhythm, and that, God wot, full rude also, for any reason, God wot, that I saw therein, a right simple woman might in my mind, speak it of her own wit well enough. Howbeit, I said, that because it was constantly reported for a truth, that God wrought in her, and that a miracle was showed upon her, I durst not, nor would not, be bold in judging the matter. And the king's grace, as methought, esteemed the matter as light as it after proved lewd.

From that time till about Christmas was twelvemonth, albeit that continually there was much talking of her, and of her holiness, yet never heard I any talk rehearsed, either of revelation of hers, or miracle, saving that I heard say divers times, in my lord Cardinal's days, that she had been both with his lordship and with the king's grace; but what she said, either

to the one or to the other, upon my faith I never heard any one word.

Now, as I was about to tell you, about Christmas was twelvemonth, Father Risby, Friar Observant, then of Canterbury, lodged one night at mine house; where, after supper a little before he went to his chamber, he fell in communication with me of the nun, giving her high commendation of holiness, and that it was wonderful to see and understand the works that God wrought in her; which thing I answered, that I was very glad to hear it, and thanked God thereof. Then he told me that she had been with my lord legate in his life, and with the king's grace too; and that she had told my lord legate a revelation of hers, of three swords that God had put in my lord legate's hand, which if he ordered not well God would lay it sore to his charge. The first, she said, was the ordering the spirituality unto the Pope as legate. The second, the rule that he bore in order of the temporalty under the king, as his chancellor. And the third, she said, was the meddling he was put in trust with by the king, concerning the great matter of his marriage. And therewithal I said unto him, that any revelation of the king's matters I would not hear of; I doubt not that the goodness of God should direct his highness with his grace and wisdom, that the king should take such an end as God should be pleased with, to the king's honour and surety of the realm.

When he heard me say these words, or the like, he said unto me, that God had specially commanded to pray for the king; and forth with he brake again into her revelations concerning the cardinal, that his

soul was saved by her mediation; and without any other communication went into his chamber. And he and I never talked any more of any such manner of matter, nor since his departing on the morrow I never saw him afterwards to my remembrance, till I saw him at St. Paul's Cross.

After this, about Shrovetide, there came unto me a little before supper, Father Rich, Friar Observant of Richmond; and as we fell in talking, I asked him of Father Risby, how he did; and upon that occasion, he asked me, whether Father Risby had anything showed me of the holy nun of Kent; and I said, yea, and that I was very glad to hear of her virtue. "I would not," quoth he, "tell you again that you have heard of him already; but I have heard, and known many great graces that God hath wrought in her, and in other folks, by her, which I would gladly tell you, if I thought you had not heard them already." Therewith he asked me, whether Father Risby had told me anything of her being with my lord cardinal; and I said, "yea." "Then he told you," quoth he, "of the three swords?" "Yea, verily," quoth I. "Did he tell you," quoth he, "of the revelations that she had concerning the king's grace?" "Nay, forsooth," quoth I, "nor if he would have done, I would not have given him a hearing; nor verily no more I would indeed, for since she hath been with the king's grace herself, and told him, methought it a thing needless to tell me, or to any man else."

And when Father Rich perceived that I would not hear her revelations concerning the king's grace, he talked on a little of her virtue, and let her revela-

tions alone; and therewith my supper was set upon the board, where I required him to sit with me; but he would in no wise tarry, but departed to London.

After that night I talked with him twice, once in mine own house, another in his own garden at the Friars, at every time a great space, but not of any revelations touching the king's grace, but only of other mean folk, I know not of whom, of which things some were very strange, and some were very childish. But albeit that he said he had seen her lie in her trance in great pains, and that he had at other times taken great spiritual comfort from her communication; yet did he never tell me that she had told him those tales herself; for if he had, I would for the tale of Mary Magdalene which he told me, and for the tale of the hostie, with which as I have heard, she said she was housled at the king's mass at Calais—if I had heard it of him as told unto himself by her mouth for a revelation, I would have both liked him and her the worse. But whether ever I heard the same tale of Rich or of Risby, or of neither of them both, but of some other man since he was in hold, in good faith I cannot tell; but I wot well when or wheresoever I heard it, methought it a tale too marvellous to be true, and very likely that she had told some man her dream, which told it out for a revelation. And in effect I little doubted but that some of these tales that were told of her were untrue; but yet, since I never heard them reported as spoken by her own mouth, I thought nevertheless that many of them might be true, and she a very virtuous woman too; as

some lies be peradventure written of some that be saints in heaven, and yet many miracles indeed done by them for all that.

After this, I being upon a day at Sion, and talking with the fathers together at the grate, they showed me that she had been with them, and showed me divers things that some of them misliked in her; and in this talking they wished that I had spoken with her, and said they would fain see how I should like her. Whereupon, afterwards, when I heard that she was there again, I came thither to see her, and to speak with her myself. At which communication had, in a little chapel, there were none present but we two; in the beginning whereof I showed that my coming to her was not of any curious mind, anything to know of such things as folks talked that it pleased God to reveal and show unto her, but for the great virtue that I had heard so many years, everyday more and more spoken and reported of her; I, therefore, had a great mind to see her and be acquainted with her, that she might have somewhat the more occasion to remember me to God in her devotion and prayer; whereunto she gave me a very good, virtuous answer, that as God did of his goodness far better by her than she a poor wretch was worthy, so she feared that many folk, yet beside that, spoke of their own favourable mind many things for her, far above the truth, and that of me she had many such things heard, that already she prayed for me, and ever would; whereof I heartily thanked her.

I said unto her: "Madam, one Helen, a maiden dwelling about Tottenham, of whose trances and reve-

lations there hath been much talking, she hath been with me of late, and showed me that she was with you, and that after the rehearsal of such visions as she had seen, you showed her that they were no revelations, but plain illusions of the devil, and advised her to cast them out of her mind; and verily she gave therein good credence unto you, and thereupon hath left to lean any longer unto such visions of her own; whereupon she saith she findeth your words true, for ever since she hath been the less visited with such things as she was wont to be before."

To this she answered me, "Forsooth, sir, there is in this point no praise unto me, but the goodness of God, as it appeareth, hath wrought much meekness in her soul, which hath taken my rude warning so well, and not grudged to hear her spirit and her visions reproved."

I liked her, in good faith, better for this answer, than for many of these things that I heard reported by her (concerning her). After which she told me, upon that occasion, how great need folk have, that are visited with such visions, to take heed, and prove well of what spirit they come of; and in that communication she told me, that of late the devil, in likeness of a bird, was flying and fluttering about her in her chamber, and suffered himself to be taken; and being in hand, suddenly changed, in their sight that were present, into such a strange ugly fashioned bird, that they were all afraid, and threw him out of the window.

For conclusion, we talked no word of the king's grace, or any great personage else, nor in effect of any man or woman, but of herself and myself; but after

no long communication had, for or (ere) ever met my time came to go home. I gave her a double ducat, and prayed her to pray for me and mine, and so departed from her, and never spake with her after. Howbeit, of a truth, I had a great good opinion of her, and had her in great estimation, as you shall perceive by the letter that I wrote unto her. For afterwards, because I had often heard that many right worshipful folks, as well men as women, used to have much communication with her, and many folk are of nature inquisitive and curious, whereby they fall sometimes into such talking, and better were to forbear, of which thing I nothing thought while I talked with her of charity; therefore, I wrote her a letter thereof, which since it may be, peradventure, that ye brake or lost, I shall insert the very copy thereof in this present letter.

These were the very words:—

" Good Madam and my right dearly beloved sister in our Lord God, After most hearty commendation, I shall beseech you to take my good mind in good worth, and pardon me, that I am so homely as of myself unrequired, and also without necessity, to give counsel to you, of whom for the good inspirations, and great revelations, that it liketh almighty God of his goodness to give and show, as many wise, well learned, and very virtuous folk testify, I myself have need, for the comfort of my soul, to require and ask advice. For surely good madam, since it pleased God sometime to suffer, such as are far under and of little esti-

mation, to give yet fruitful advertisement to such other as are in the light of the spirit so far above them, that there were between them no comparison, as he suffered his high prophet Moses to be in some things advised and counselled by Jethro—I cannot for the love that in our Lord I bear you, refrain to put you in remembrance of one thing, which in my poor mind I think highly necessary to be by your wisdom considered, referring the end and the other thereof to God and his holy spirit to direct you. Good Madam, I doubt not but that you remember that in the beginning of my communication with you I showed you that I neither was, nor would be, curious of any knowledge of other men's matters, and least of all of any matter of princes, or of the realm, in case it so were that God had, as to many good folk aforetime he hath, any time revealed unto you such things; I said unto your ladyship, that I was not only not desirous to hear of, but also would not hear of. Now, Madam, I consider well that many folk desire to speak with you which are not all peradventure of my mind in this point; but some hap to be curious and inquisitive of things that little pertain unto their parts; and some might peradventure hap to talk of such things as might after turn to much harm; as I think you have heard how the late Duke of Buckingham, moved with the fame of one that was reported for an holy monk, had had such talking with him, as after was a great part of his destruction, and disinheriting of his blood, and great slander and infamy of religion. It sufficeth me, good Madam, to put you in remembrance of such things as I nothing doubt your wisdom and the

spirit of God shall keep you from talking with any person, specially with high persons, of any such manner things as pertain to princes' affairs, or the state of the realm, but only to commune and talk with any person, high and low, of any such manner things as may to the soul be profitable for you to show, and for them to know. And thus, my good lady and dearly beloved sister in our Lord, I make an end of this my needless advertisement unto you, whom the Blessed Trinity preserve and increase in grace, and put in your mind to recommend me and mine unto him in your devout prayers."

"At Chelsea, this Tuesday, by the hand of your heart loving brother and bedesman,

Thomas More, Kt."

At the receipt of this letter she answered my servant that she heartily thanked me: soon after this there came to mine house the prior of the Charterhouse at Sheen, and one Brother Williams with him, who nothing talked to me but of her, and of the great joy that they took in her virtue, but of any of her revelations they had no communication. But at another time Brother Williams came to me, and told me a long tale of her, being at the house of a knight in Kent, that was sore troubled with temptations to destroy himself; and none other thing we talked of, nor should have done of likelihood, though we had tarried together much longer, he took so great pleasure, good man, to tell the tale, with all the circumstances at length.

When I came again another day to Sion, on

a day in which there was a profession, some of the fathers asked me how I liked the nun. And I answered that, in good faith, I liked her very well in her talking; "howbeit," quoth I, "she is never the nearer tried by that; for I assure you, she were likely to be very bad, if she seemed good, ere I should think her other, till she happened to be proved nought;" And in good faith, that is my manner indeed, except I were set to search and examine the truth upon likelihood of some cloaked evil; for in that case, although I nothing suspected the person myself, yet no less than if I suspected him sore, I would, as far as my wit could serve me, search to find out the truth, as your self hath done very prudently in this matter; wherein you have done, in my mind, to your great laud and praise, a meritorious deed, in bringing forth to light such detestable hypocrisy; whereby every other wretch may take warning, and be feared to set forth their own devilish, dissembled falsehood, under the manner and colour of the wonderful work of God; for verily, this woman so handled herself, with help of that evil spirit hath inspired her, that after her own confession declared at Paul's Cross, when I sent word by my servant unto the Prior of the Charterhouse, that she was undoubtedly proved a false, deceiving hypocrite, the good man had had so good opinion of her so long, that he could at the first scantly believe me therein. Howbeit it was not he alone that thought her so very good, but many another right good man beside, as little marvel was upon so good report, till she proved naught.

I remember me further, that in communication be-

tween Father Rich and me, I counselled him that in such strange things as concerned such folk as had come unto her, to whom, as she said, she had told the causes of their coming ere themselves spake thereof, and such good fruit as they said that many men had received by her prayer, he and such other so reported it, and thought the knowledge thereof should much pertain to the glory of God, should first cause the things to be well and sure examined by the ordinaries, and such as had authority thereunto; so that it might be surely known whether the things were true or not, and that there were no letters intervening among them, or else the letters might after hap to aweigh the credence of these things that were true. And when he told me the tale of Mary Magdalene, I said unto him: "Father Rich, that she is a good, virtuous woman, in good faith I hear so many good folk so report, that I verily think it true; and think it well likely that God worketh some good and great things by her; but yet are these strange tales no part of our creed; and, therefore, before you see them surely proved, you shall have my poor counsel, not to wed yourself so far forth to the credence of them as to report them very surely for truth, lest that if it should hap that they were afterwards proved false it might minish your estimation in your preaching, whereof might grow great loss." To this he thanked me for my counsel, but how he used it after I cannot tell.

Thus have I, good Mr. Cromwell, fully declared to you, as far as myself can call to remembrance, all that ever I have done or said in this matter, wherein I

am sure that never one of you all shall tell you any further thing of effect; for if any of them, or any man else, report of me, as I trust verily no man will, and I wot well truly no man can, any word or deed by me spoken or done, touching any breach of my legal (loyal) truth and duty towards my most redoubted sovereign, and natural liege lord, I will come to mine answer, and make it good in such wise as becometh a poor true man to do; that whosoever any such thing shall say, shall therein say untrue; for I neither have in this matter done evil, nor said evil, no so much as any evil thing thought, but only have been glad, and rejoiced of them that were reported for good; which condition I shall nevertheless keep towards all other good folk, for the false, cloaked hypocrisy of any of these, no more than I shall esteem Judas[1] the true apostle, for Judas the false traitor.

But so purpose I to bear myself in every man's company while I live, that good man nor bad, neither monk, friar, nor nun, nor other woman nor man in this world shall make me digress from my truth and faith, either towards God or towards my natural prince by the grace of almighty God; and as you therein find me true, so I heartily therein pray you to continue towards me your favour and good will, as you shall be sure of my poor daily prayer; for other pleasure can I not do you. And thus the Blessed Trinity, both bodily and ghostly, long preserve and prosper you.

I pray you pardon me, that I write not unto you of mine own hand, for verily I am compelled to forbear

[1] Thaddeus, St. Jude.

writing for a while, by reason of this disease of mine, whereof the chief occasion is grown as it is thought, by the stooping and leaning on my breast, that I have used in writing. And thus, eftsoons, I beseech our Lord long to preserve you.

Henry does not seem to have been satisfied with this letter, or perhaps Cromwell pretended that there was some doubt as to its genuineness. The fact remains that More was named as guilty of misprision of treason[1] in the bill of attainder brought in by the House of Lords on February 21st, 1534. More then wrote the following letter to Cromwell:

III.

More to Cromwell.

Right Worshipful,—After right hearty recommendations, so it is that I am informed, that there is a bill put in against me into the higher house before the lords, concerning my communication with the nun of Canterbury, and my writing unto her: whereof I not a little marvel, the truth of the matter being such as God and I know it is, and as I have plainly declared unto you by my former letters, wherein I found you then so good that I am now bold eftsoons on your goodness to desire you to show me the favour, that I might the rather by your good means, have a copy of that bill. Which seen, if I find any untrue surmise

[1] Knowledge and concealment of treason in the matter of the Holy Maid of Kent.

therein as of likelihood there is, I may make my humble suit unto the king's good grace, and declare the truth, either to his grace or by his grace's commandment wheresoever the matter shall require. I am so sure of my truth toward his grace, that I cannot mistrust his grace's favour toward me, upon the truth knowen, nor the judgment of any honest man. Nor never shall there loss in this matter grieve me, being myself, so innocent as God and I know me, whatsoever should happen me therein, by the grace of Almighty God, who both bodily and ghostly preserve you. At Chelsea, this present Saturday, by the hand of heartily all your own, Thomas More, Knight.

More then wrote to the king himself.

IV.

More to Henry VIII. (Feb. or March, 1534).

'It may like your highness to call to your grace's remembrance, that at such a time as of the great weighty room and office of your Chancellor (with which so far above my merits or qualities able and mete therefor, your highness had of your incomparable goodness honoured and exalted me) ye were so good and gracious unto me, as at my poor humble suit to discharge and disburden me, giving me license with your grace's favour to bestow the residue of my life to come about the provision for my soul in the service of God, and to be your bedesman and pray

for you, it pleased your highness further to say unto me, that for the service which I before had done you (which it then liked your goodness far above my deserving to commend) that in any suit that I should after have to your grace, that either should concern mine honour (that word it liked your highness to use unto me) or that should pertain unto my profit, I should find your highness good and gracious lord unto me. So is it now gracious sovereign that worldly honour is a thing whereof I have resigned both the possession and the desire, in the resignation of your most honourable office. And worldly profit I trust experience proveth and daily more and more shall prove, that I never was very greedy thereon. But now as my most humble suit unto your excellent highness, to beseech that same somewhat to tender my poor honesty: Howbeit principally, that of your accustomed goodness, no sinister information move your noble grace to have any more distrust of my truth and devotion toward you, than I have or shall during my life give cause.

For in this matter of the nun of Canterbury, I have unto your trusty councillor master Tho. Cromwell by my writing as plainly declared the truth, as I possibly can. Which my declaration, of his duty towards your grace, and his goodness towards me, he have I understand declared unto your grace. In any point of all which my dealing whether any other man may peradventure put any doubt or move any scruple of suspicion, that can I neither tell, nor lieth in my hand to let. But unto myself, it is not possible any part of my said demeanour to seem evil, the very clear-

ness of mine own conscience, knoweth in all that matter my mind and intent to good. Wherefor, most gracious sovereign, I neither will nor yet can well become me with your highness to reason or argue the matter, but in my most humble manner prostrate at your gracious feet, I only beseech your grace, with your own high prudence and your accustomed goodness, consider and weigh the matter. And if that in your so doing, your own virtuous mind shall give you, that notwithstanding the manifold and excellent goodness that your gracious highness hath by so many manner of ways used unto me, I were a wretch of such a monstrous ingratitude, as could with any of them all, or any other person living, digress from my bounden duty of allegiance toward your good grace, then desire I no further favour at your gracious hand, than the loss of all that ever I may lose, goods, lands, liberty and finally my life withal: whereof the keeping of any part unto myself, could never do me pennyworth of pleasure, but only should my comfort be, that after my short life and your long (which with continual prosperity to God's pleasure our Lord of his mercy send you) I should once meet your grace again in heaven, and there be merry with you: where among mine other pleasures this should yet be one, that your grace should surely see there then, that howsoever ye take me, I am your true bedesman now, and ever have been, and will be till I die, howsoever your pleasure be to do by me.

Howbeit if in the considering of my cause, your high wisdom and gracious goodness, perceive (as I verily trust in God you shall) that I none

otherwise have demeaned myself, than well may stand with my bounden duty of faithfulness toward your royal majesty, that I in my most humble wise beseech your most noble grace, that the knowledge of your true gracious persuasion in that behalf, may relieve the torment of my present heaviness, conceived of the dread and fear (by that I hear such a grievous bill put by your learned Council into your high court of parliament against me) lest your grace might by some sinister information, be moved anything to think the contrary. Which if your highness do not, as I trust in God and your great goodness (the matter by your own prudence examined and considered) ye will not, then in my most humble manner I beseech your highness further (albeit that in respect of my former request this other thing is very slight) yet since your highness hath herebefore of your mere abundant goodness heaped and accumulated upon me (though I was thereto far unworthy) from time to time both worship and great honour too, since I now have left all such things, and nothing seek or desire but the life to come, and pray for your grace the while, it may like your highness of your accustomed benignity, somewhat to tender my poor honesty, and never suffer (by the mean of such a bill put forth against me) any man take occasion hereafter against the truth to slander me: which should yet by the peril of their own soul, do themself more hurt than me: which shall I trust settle my heart with your gracious favour, to depend upon the comfort of the truth and hope of heaven, and not upon the fallible opinion or soon spoken words of light and soon changeable people.

And thus most dread and dear sovereign lord, I beseech the blessed Trinity preserve your most noble grace both body and soul, and all that are your well willers, and amend all the contrary: among whom if ever I be or ever have been one then I pray God that he may with mine open shame and destruction declare it. At my pore house in Chelcith the vth day of Marche by the knowen rude hand of your moost humble and moost hevy faithful subjethe and bedesman.

More's name was indeed struck out of the bill of attainder, and "as the king did not find, as it seems he hoped, an occasion for doing him more harm, he has taken away his salary." But before this took place he had to answer graver charges brought against him when he appeared before four members of the king's council, namely, Cranmer, who was now archbishop of Canterbury, Audeley, the lord Chancellor, Norfolk, and Cromwell. Why, he was asked, had he refused to acknowledge the wisdom and necessity of the king's recent attitude towards the Pope? He made suitable excuses on the ground that he had explained his conscientious opinions to the king himself without incurring the royal displeasure.

After this interview he returned to Chelsea "Wherein by the way," says Roper, "he was very merry; and for that I was nothing sorry, hoping that he had gotten himself discharged out of the parliament bill. When he was landed and come home, then walked we twain alone in his garden, where I, desirous to know how he had sped, said: 'I trust, sir, that all is well because you are so merry?' 'It is so indeed, son Roper, I thank God,' quoth he. 'Are you, then, put out of the bill?' quoth I. 'By my troth, son Roper,' quoth he, 'I never remembered it.' 'Never remembered it!' said I; 'a cause that toucheth yourself too near, and us all for your

sake. I am sorry to hear it, for I verily trusted, when I saw you so merry, that all had been well.' Then said he: 'Wilt thou know, son Roper, why I was so merry? In good faith I rejoiced I had given the devil a foul fall, and that with those lords I had gone so far as, without great shame, I could never go back again.' At which words waxed I very sad, for though himself liked it well, yet liked it me but little."

On his return from this interview More at once made a written statement as to his exact position on the three matters of the nun, the divorce and the papal supremacy. This he sent as a letter to Cromwell.

V.

Another letter written by Sir Thomas More to Master Tho. Cromwell in February or in March, 1534[1] and in the xxv year of Henry VIII.

Right Worshipful, after my most hearty recommendation, it may please you to understand, that I have perceived by the relation of my son Roper (for which I beseech Almighty God reward you) your most charitable labour taken for me towards the King's gracious Highness in the procuring at his most gracious hand, the relief and comfort of this woeful heaviness in which my heart standeth, neither for the love of goodness, lands or liberty, not of any respect either, of this kind of honesty that standeth in the opinion of people in worldly reputation: all which manner of things (I thank Our Lord) I so little esteem for any affection therein towards myself, that I can

[1] Dated 6th March in MS. copy.

well be content to jeopard, lose and forego them all and my life therewith, without any further respite than ever this same present day, either for the pleasure of God or my prince. But surely good Master Cromwell (as I by mouth declared unto you some part for all I could neither then say nor now write) it thoroughly pierceth my poor heart that the king's highness (whose gracious favour towards me far above all the things of this world I have ever more desired, and whereof, both for the conscience of mine own true faithful heart and devotion towards him, and for the manifold benefits of his high goodness continually bestowed upon me, I thought myself always sure) should conceive any such opinion of me as to think that in my communication either with the nun or the Friars, or in my letter written unto the nun I had any other manner (of) mind, than might well stand with the duty of a tender loving subject towards his natural prince: or that his grace should reckon in me any manner of obstinate heart against his pleasure in anything that ever I said or did concerning his great matter of his marriage, or concerning the primacy of the Pope. Never would I wish other thing in this world more like than that his highness in these things all three as perfectly knew my dealing and as thoroughly saw my mind, as I do myself, or as God doth himself, whose sight passeth deeper into my thought than mine own.

For sir as for the first matter, that is to wit my letter or communication (with the nun), the whole discourse whereof in my former letter I have as plainly declared unto you as I possibly can, so pray I God to withdraw that scruple and doubt of my good mind

out of the king's noble breast; and none otherwise but as I not only thought none harm, but also purposed good: and in that thing most in which (as I perceive) his grace conceiveth most grief and suspicion, that is to wit in my letter that I wrote unto her. And therefore sir since I have by writing declared the truth of my deed and am ready by oath to declare the truth of mine intent, I can desire no further thing by me to be done in the matter but only beseech almighty God to put into the king's gracious mind, that as God knoweth the thing is indeed, so his noble grace may take it.

Now touching the second point, concerning his grace's great matter of his marriage, to the intent that you may see cause with the better conscience to make suit unto his highness for me, I shall as plainly declare you my demeanour in that matter, as I have already declared you in the other, for more plainly I cannot.

Sir, upon a time of my coming from beyond the sea,[1] where I had been in the King's business, I repaired (as my duty was) unto the king's grace, being at that time at Hampton Court. At which time, suddenly his highness walking in the gallery, spake with me of his great matter, and showed me that it was perceived that his marriage was not only against the positive laws of the church, and the written law of God, but also in such wise against the law of nature, that it could in no wise by the Church be dispensable.

Now so was it before my going over the sea, I had heard certain things moved against the bull of the dis-

[1] Sept., 1527.

pensation, concerning the words in the law levitical and the law deutronomical, to prove the prohibition to be *de jure divino*. But yet perceived I not at that time, but that the greater hope of the matter stood in certain faults that were found in the bull, whereby the bull should by the law not be sufficient. And such comfort was there in that point (as far as I perceived) a good season, that the counsel on the other part, were fain to bring forth a brief, by which they pretended those defaults to be supplied: the truth of which brief was by the king's counsel suspected, and much diligence was thereafter done for the trial of that point: wherein what was finally found, either I never knew or else I not remembered. But I rehearse you this to the intent you shall know that the first time that ever I heard that point moved, that it would be in such high degree against the law of nature, was the time in which I began to tell you, the king's grace showed it to me himself and laid the bible open before me, and there read me the words that moved his highness and divers other erudite persons so to think, and asked me further what myself thought thereon. At which time not presuming to look that his highness should anything take that point for the more proved or unproved, for my poor mind in so great a matter, I showed nevertheless (that my duty was at his commandment) what thing I thought upon the words that I there read. Whereupon his highness accepting benignly my sudden unadvised answer, commanded me to commune further with master (Foxe), for now his gracious almoner, and to read with him a book then was in making for that matter. After which book read and my poor

opinion eftsoons declared unto his highness thereupon, his highness like a prudent and a virtuous prince assembled at another time at Hampton Court a good number of very well-learned men, at which time as far as ever I heard, there were (as was in so great a matter most likely to be) divers opinions among them. However I never heard, but that they agreed at that time upon a certain form in which the book should be made, which was afterwards at York Place, in my lord Cardinal's chamber, read in the presence of divers bishops and many learned men. And they all thought that there appeared in the book, good and reasonable causes, that might well move the king's highness, being so virtuous a prince, to conceive in his mind a scruple against his marriage: which while he could not otherwise avoid, he did well and virtuously for the aquieting of his conscience, to sue and procure to have his doubt decided by judgment of the Church. After this, the suit began, and the legates sat upon the matter. During all which time I never meddled there, nor was a man mete to do, for the matter was in hand by an ordinary process of the spiritual law, whereof I could little skill.

And yet while the legates were sitting upon the matter, it pleased the king's highness to send me in the company of my lord of London, now of Durham, in an embassy about the peace, that at our being there was concluded at Cambray, between his highness and the Emperor and the French king. And after my coming home, his highness of his only goodness (as far unworthy as I was thereto) made me as you well know his Chancellor of this realm.[1]

[1] October, 1529.

Soon after which time, his grace moved me again, yet eftsoons, to look and consider his great matter, and well and indifferently to ponder such things as I should find therein. And if it so were that thereupon it should hap me to such things as should persuade me to the part, he would gladly have me among other of his councillors in the matter. And nevertheless he graciously declared unto (me) that he would in no wise that I should no other thing do or say therein, than upon that that I should perceive mine own conscience should serve me, and that I should first look unto God, and after God unto him. Which most gracious words was the first lesson also he ever (of) his grace gave me at my first coming into his noble service.

This motion was to me very comfortable and much I longed beside anything that myself either had seen or by further search should hap to find for the one part or the other, yet specially to have some conference in the matter, with some such of his grace's learned counsel, as most for his part had labored, and most had found in the matter. Whereupon his highness assigned unto me, the now most reverend fathers, archbishops of Canterbury and York, with master doctor, for now his grace's almoner, and master doctor Nicholas (De Burgo), the Italian friar. Whereupon I not only sought and read, and as far forth as my poor wit and learning served me well weighed and considered every such thing as I could find myself, or read in any other man's labor that I could get, which anything had written therein, but had also diligent conference with his grace's council-

lors beforesaid: whose honors and worships I nothing mistrust in this point, but that they both have and will report unto his highness, that they never found obstinate manner or fashion in me, but a mind as toward and as conformable as reason could in the matter disputable require. Whereupon the king's highness being farther advertised both by them and by myself, of my poor opinion in the matter (wherein to have been able or mete to do him service, I would as I then showed his highness, have been more glad, than of all such worldly commodities as I either then had, or sure should come to) his highness graciously taking in my good mind in his behalf, used of his blessed disposition in the persecuting of his great matter, only those (of whom his grace had good number) whose conscience his grace perceived well and fully persuaded upon the part. And as well me as any other to whom his highness thought the thing to seem otherwise, he used in his other business: abiding of his abounding goodness nevertheless gracious lord unto every man, nor never was willing to put any man in ruffle or trouble of his conscience.

After this did I never nothing more therein, nor never any word wrote I therein to them paring of his grace's part neither before or after: but settling my mind in quiet to serve his grace in other things, I would not so much as look nor let lie by me any book of the other part, albeit that I gladly read afterwards divers books that were made on his part. Nor never would I read the book that master Abel made on the other side, nor other books which were (as I heard say) made in Latin beyond the

sea, nor never gave ear to the Pope's proceeding in the matter. Moreover, where I had found in my study, a book that I had before borrowed of my lord of Bath (Dr. Clark), which book he had made of the matter at such time as the legates sat here thereupon, which book had been by me negligently cast aside, and that I showed him I would send him home his book again, he told me that in good faith he had long time before discharged his mind upon the matter, and having forgotten that copy to remain in my hand, had burned his own copy that he had thereof at home: and because he no more minded to meddle anything in the matter, he desired me to burn the same book too. And upon my faith so did I. Besides this divers other ways have I so used myself that if I rehearse them all, it should well appear that I never have had against his grace's marriage any manner (of) demeanor whereby his highness might have any manner cause or occasion of displeasure toward me. For likewise as I am not he which either can, or whom it could become to take upon me the determination or decision of such a weighty matter, whereof divers points a great way passed my learning, so am I he, that among other (of) his grace's faithful subjects, his highness being in possession of his marriage, will most heartily pray for the prosperous estate of his grace, long to continue to the pleasure of God.

As touching the third point, the primacy of the Pope, I nothing meddle in the matter. Truth it is, that as I told you, when you desired me to show you what I thought therein, I was myself sometime not of the mind that the primacy of the See should be begun

by the institution of God, until I read the matter those things that the king's highness had written in his most famous book against the heresies of Martin Luther. At the first reading whereof, I moved the king's highness either to leave out that point, or else to touch it more slenderly, for doubt of such things as after might hap to fall in question between his highness and some Pope, as between princes and Popes divers times have done. Whereunto his highness answered me, that he would in no wise anything minish of that matter, of which thing his highness showed me secret cause whereof I never had anything heard before. But surely after that I had read his grace's book therein, and so many other things as I have seen in that point by this continuance of this seven[1] years since and more, I have found, in effect the substance of all the holy doctors from St. Ignatius, disciple of St. John the Evangelist, unto our own days both Latins and Greeks, so consonant and agreeing in that point, and the thing by such general Councils so confirmed also, that in good faith I never neither read nor heard anything of such effect on the other side, that ever could lead me to think that my conscience was well discharged, but rather in right great peril if I should follow the other side, and deny the primacy to be provided by God. Which if we did yet can I nothing (as I showed you) perceive any commodity that ever could come by that denial.

For that the primacy was at the leastwise instituted by the corps of Christendom, and for a great urgent

[1] MS. ten.

cause in avoiding schisms, and corroborate by continual succession more than the space of a thousand years at the least (for there are past almost a thousand years since the time of holy St. Gregory). And therefore since all Christendom is one corps, I cannot perceive how any member thereof may without the common assent of the body depart from the common head. And then if we may not lawfully leave it by ourselves, I cannot perceive but if the thing were a-treating in a General Council, what the question could avail, whether the primacy were instituted immediately by God, or ordained by the Church. As for the General Council assembled lawfully, I never could perceive, but that in the declaration of the truth, it is to be believed and to be standen to, the authority whereof ought to be taken for undoubtable, or else were there in nothing no certainty, but through Christendom upon every man's affectionate reason all things might be brought from day to day into continual ruffle and confusion. From which by the General Councils, the spirit of God assisting, every such Council well assembled, keepeth and ever shall keep the corps of his Catholic Church. And verily since the king's highness hath (as by the book of his honourable counsel appeareth) appealed to the General Council from the Pope, in which Council I beseech Our Lord send his grace comfortable speed, methinketh in my poor mind it could be no furtherance thereunto his grace's cause, if his highness should in his own realm before, either by laws making or books putting forth, seem to derogate and deny, not only the primacy of the See Apostolic, but also the

authority of the General Councils too. Which I verily trust his highness intendeth not.

For in the next General Council it may well happen, that this Pope may be deposed, another substituted in his room, with whom the king's highness may be very well content. For albeit that I have for my own part such opinion of the Pope's primacy as I have shown you, yet never thought I the Pope above the General Council, nor never have, in any book of mine put forth among the king's subjects in our vulgar tongue, advanced greatly the Pope's authority. For albeit that a man may peradventure find therein, that after the common manner of Christian realms, I speak of him as primate, yet never do I stick thereon when reasoning and proving of that point. And in my book against the Masker I wrote not, I wot well, five times[1] and yet of no more but only St. Peter himself, from whose person many take not (away) the primacy, even of those that granted none of his successors. And yet was that book made, printed, and put forth of very truth, before that any of the books of the Council was either printed or spoken of. But whereas I had written thereof at length in my *Confutation* (1531-2) before and for the proof thereof had compiled together all that, I could find therefore, at such time as I little looked that they should fall between the king's highness and the Pope, such a breach as is fallen since, when I after that saw the thing likely to draw towards such displeasure between them, I suppressed it utterly, and never put word thereof into my book, but put out the remnant without it.

[1] E. W. "times." MS. "lines."

Which thing well declareth, I never intended anything to meddle in that matter against the king's gracious pleasure whatsoever mine own opinion were therein.

And thus have I good Master Cromwell, long troubled your mastership, with the long process of these matters, with which I neither durst, nor it could become me to encumber the king's noble grace. But I beseech you for Our Lord's love, that ye be not so weary of my most cumbersome suit, but that it may like you at such opportune time or times as your wisdom may find, to help that his highness may, by your goodness, be fully informed of my true faithful mind, that he may the rather by the means of your wisdom and dexterity, consider that in the matter of the nun, there was never on my part any other mind than good: nor yet in any other thing else, never was there nor never shall there be, any further fault found in me, than that I cannot in everything think the same way that some other men of more wisdom and deeper learning do: nor can find in mine heart otherwise to say than as mine own conscience giveth me. Which condition hath never grown in anything that might touch his gracious pleasure of any obstinate mind or mis-affectionate appetite, but of a timorous conscience rising haply for lack of better perceiving and yet not without tender respect unto my most bounden duty towards his noble grace. Whose only favor I so much esteem, that I nothing have of mine own in all this world except only my soul, but that I will with better will forego it, than abide of his highness one heavy displeasant look. And thus I make an end of my long

troublous process, beseeching the Blessed Trinity for the great goodness you have shown me, and the great comfort you do me, both bodily and ghostly, to prosper you and in heaven reward you.

A point in this letter calls for attention. It is that passage in which More appears to speak as if, at one time, he had doubted whether the papal supremacy were of divine institution or not. Father Bridgett points to Erasmus and Tunstall as his probable informers on this matter. But when he applied himself to study the question seriously he soon came to believe, with Fisher, that the papal supremacy was of divine institution. And to this view he adhered ever after.

On March 30, 1534, a bill was passed and received the royal assent which imposed an oath of adherence to the new act of succession. The commissioners who were appointed to administer it added a clause abjuring 'any foreign potentate,' while the clergy were required to make an explicit abjuration of the pope.

Previous to his appearance before these commissioners More made a touching departure from Chelsea which may best be recorded in Roper's own words: "Then Sir Thomas More, as his accustomed manner always was ere he entered into any matter of importance . . . to go to church to be confessed, to hear Mass, and to be houseled, so did he likewise in the morning early the self-same day that he was summoned to the lords at Lambeth. And whereas he evermore used before, at his departure from his wife and children, whom he tenderly loved, to have them bring him to the boat, and there to kiss them, and bid them all farewell, then would he suffer none of them forth the gate to follow him, but pulled the wicket after him, and shut them all from him; and with a heavy heart, as by his countenance it appeared, with me and our four servants, there took the boat towards Lambeth. Wherein sitting still sadly awhile, at the last he suddenly rounded me in the

ear, and said: 'Son Roper, I thank our Lord the field is won.' What he meant thereby I then wist not, yet, loath to seem ignorant, I answered: 'Sir, I am therefore very glad.' But, as I conjectured afterward, it was for that the love he had to God wrought in him so effectually that he conquered all his carnal affection utterly."[1]

VI.

Sir Thomas More, upon warning given him came before the king's commissioners at the Archbishop of Canterbury's palace at Lambeth (that Monday the xiii day of April in the year of our Lord God 1534, and in the latter end of the xxv year of the reign of Henry VIII) where he refused the oath then offered unto him. Thereupon was he delivered to the Abbot of Westminster to be kept as a prisoner: with whom he remained till Friday following, and then was sent prisoner to the Tower of London. And shortly after his coming thither he wrote a letter and sent it to his eldest daughter mistress Margaret Roper; the copy whereof here followeth.

When I was before the lords at Lambeth, I was the first that was called in, albeit that master doctor the vicar of Croydon was come before me, and divers other. After the cause of my sending for, declared unto me (whereof I somewhat marvelled in my mind, considering that they sent for no more temporal men

[1] Roper's *Life of More*, "the shortest and most perfect of biographies," should be read in conjunction with these Letters. It is included in the Scott Library (No. 53), in the volume entitled *More's Utopia.*

but me) I desired the sight of the oath, which they showed me under the great seal. Then desired I the sight of the act of the succession, which was delivered me in a printed roll. After which read secretly by myself, and the other considered with the act, I showed unto them, that my purpose was not to put any fault, either in the act or any man that made it, or in that oath or any man that sware it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself in good faith my conscience so moved me in the matter, that though I would not deny to sware to the succession, yet unto that oath that there was offered me, I could not swear, without the jeoparding of my soul to perpetual damnation. And that if they doubted whether I did refuse the oath only for the grudge of my conscience, or for any other fantasy, I was ready therein to satisfy them by mine oath. Which if they trusted not, what should they be the better to give me any oath? And if they trusted that I would therein swear true, then trusted I that of their goodness they would not move me to swear the oath that they offered me, perceiving that for to swear it was against my conscience.

Unto this my lord Chancellor said, that they all were very sorry to hear me say thus and see me thus refuse the oath. And they said all, that on their faith I was the very first that ever refused it: which would cause the king's highness to conceive great suspicion of me and great indignation toward me. And therewith they showed me the roll, and let me see the name of the lords and the commons which had sworn, and subscribed their names al-

ready. Which notwithstanding when they saw that I refused to swear the same myself, not blaming any other man that had sworn, I was in conclusion commanded to go down into the garden.

And thereupon I tarried in the old burned chamber that looketh into the garden and would not go down because of the heat. In that time saw I master doctor Latimer come into the garden, and there walked he with divers other doctors and chaplins of my lord of Canterbury. And very merry I saw him, for he laughed and took one or twain about the neck so handsomely that if they had been women I would have weened he had waxed wanton.

After that came master doctor Wilson forth from the lords, and was with two gentlemen brought by me, and gentlemanly sent straight unto the Tower.

What time my lord of Rochester was called in before them, that can I not tell. But at night I heard that he had been before them, but where he remained that night, and so forth till he was sent hither, I never heard.

I heard also that master vicar of Croydon, and all the remnant of the priests of London that were sent for, were sworn; and that they had such favour at the council's hand, that they were not lingered nor made to dance any long attendance to their travail and cost, as suitors were sometimes wont to be, but were sped apace to their great comfort: so far forth that master vicar of Croydon either for gladness or for dryness or else that it might be seen, *quod ille notus erat pontifici*, went to my lord's buttery bar, and called for a drink, and drank *valde familiariter*.

When they had played their pageant and were gone out of the palace, then was I called in again. And then was it declared unto me what a number had sworn ever since I went aside gladly without any sticking. Wherein I laid no blame in no man, but for my own self answered as before. Now as well before as then, they somewhat laid unto me for obstinacy, but whereas before since I refused to swear, I would not declare any special part of that oath that grudged my conscience, and opened the cause wherefore. For thereunto I had said unto them that I feared lest the king's highness would, as they said, take displeasure enough towards me for the only refusal of the oath. And that if I should open and disclose cause why, I should therewith but further exasperate his highness, which I would in no wise do, but rather would I abide all the danger and harm that might come toward me, than give his highness any occasion of further displeasure, than the offering of the oath unto me of pure necessity constrained me. Howbeit when they divers times imputed this to me for stubbornness and obstinacy, that I would neither sware the oath, nor yet declare the causes why, I declined thus far towards them, that rather than that I would be accounted for obstinate, I would upon the king's gracious license, or rather his such commandment had, as might be my sufficient warrant, that my declaration should not offend his highness, nor put me in the danger of any other statutes, I would be content to declare the causes in writing, and over that to give an oath in the beginning, that if I might find those causes by any man in such wise answered, as I might think mine own con-

science satisfied, I would after that with all mine heart swear the principal oath too.

To this I was answered, that though the king would give me a license under his letters patent, yet would it not serve against the statute. Whereto I said, that yet if I had them, I would stand unto the trust of his honour at my peril for the remnant. But yet thinketh me lo, that if I may not declare the causes without peril, then to leave them undeclared is no obstinacy.

My lord of Canterbury taking hold upon that I said, that I condemned not the consciences of them that sware, said unto me that it appeared well, that I did not take it for a very sure thing and a certain, that I might not lawfully swear it, but rather as a thing uncertain and doubtful. But then said (said my lord) you know for a certainty and a thing without doubt, that you be bounden to obey your sovereign lord your king. And therefore are ye bounden to leave of the doubt of your unsure conscience in refusing the oath, and take the sure way in obeying of your prince, and swear it.

Now all was it so, that in mine own mind methought myself not concluded, yet this argument seemed me suddenly so subtle, and namely with such authority coming out of so noble a prelate's mouth, that I could again answer nothing thereto but only that I thought myself I might not well do so, because that in my conscience this was one of the cases, in which I was bounden that I should not obey my prince, since that whatsoever other folk thought in the matter (whose conscience or learning I would not condemn nor take

upon me to judge), yet in my conscience the truth seemed on the other side. Wherein I had not informed my conscience neither suddenly nor flightily, but by long leisure and diligent search for the matter. And of truth if that reason may conclude, then have we a ready way to avoid all perplexity. For in whatsoever matter the doctors stand in great doubt, the king's commandment given upon whither side he list, foileth all the doubts.

Then said my lord of Westminster to me, that howsoever the matter seemed unto my own mind, I had cause to fear that mine own mind was erroneous, when I see the great Council of the realm determine of my mind the contrary, and that therefore I ought to change my conscience.

To that I answered that if there were no more but myself on my side, and the whole parliament upon the other, I would be sore afraid to lean to my own mind only against so many. But on the other side, if it so be, that in some things for which I refuse the oath, I have as I think I have upon my part as great a council and a greater too, I am not then bound to change my conscience, and conform it to the council of one realm, against the general council of Christendom.

Upon this master Secretary (Cromwell) as he that tenderly favoureth me, said and sware a great oath that he had liefer that his own only son (which is of truth a goodly young gentleman, and shall I trust come to much worship) had lost his head, than that I should thus have refused the oath. For surely the king's highness would now conceive a great suspicion against me, and

think that the matter of the nun of Canterbury, was all contrived by my drift. To which I said that the contrary was true and well knowen. And whatsoever should mishap me, it lay not in my power to help it without the peril of my soul. Then did my Lord Chancellor repeat before me my refusal unto master Secretary, as to him that was going unto the king's grace. And in the rehearsal, his lordship repeated again that I denied not but was content to swear unto the succession. Whereunto I said that as for that point I would be content, so that I might see my oath in that point so framed in such a manner as might stand with my conscience. Then said my lord: Marry master Secretary mark that too, that he will not swear that neither, but under some certain manner. Verily no my Lord quoth I, but that I will see it made in such wise first, as I shall myself see, that I shall nether be foresworn nor swear against my conscience.

Surely as to swear to the succession, I see no peril. But I thought and think it reason, that to mine own oath I look well myself, and be of counsel also in the fashion, and never intended to swear for a piece, and set my hand to the whole oath. Howbeit as help me God, as touching the whole oath I neither withdraw any man from it, nor ever advised any to refuse it, nor never put nor will put any scruple in any man's head, but leave every man to his own conscience. And methinketh in good faith that so were it good reason that every man should leave me to mine.

After this examination, More was committed to the custody of the Abbot of Westminster. A discussion took

place as to what should be done with More and Fisher in consequence of their refusal. Cranmer suggested that they should be asked to swear merely to the succession without any formal renunciation of the pope. But the king, urged on, as it is believed, by Anne Boleyn, would hear of no half measures and ordered that "they should be sworn as well to the preamble as to the Act." Having once more refused the oath, More was taken to the Tower on Friday, April 17, 1534. And there he remained until his death.

"As he was going thitherward," writes Roper, "wearing, as he commonly did, a chain of gold about his neck, Sir Richard Southwell, that had charge of his conveyance thither, advised him to send home his chain to his wife or some of his children. 'Nay, sir,' quoth he, 'that I will not; for if I were taken in the field by my enemies, I would they should somewhat fare the better for me.' At whose landing Mr. Lieutenant (Sir Edward Walsingham) was ready at the Tower gate to receive him, where the porter demanded of him his upper garment. 'Mr. Porter,' quoth he, 'here it is,' and he took off his cap and delivered it to him, saying: 'I am sorry it is no better for thee.' 'No, sir,' quoth the porter, 'I must have your gown.' And so was he by Mr. Lieutenant conveyed to his lodging, where he called unto him John a Wood, his own servant, there appointed to attend him, who could neither read nor write, and sware him before the lieutenant that if he should hear or see him at any time speak or write any matter against the King, Council, or the state of the realm, he should open it to the lieutenant, that the lieutenant might in contentment reveal it to the Council."

"Now when he had remained in the Tower little more than a month, my wife, longing to see her father, by her earnest suit at length got leave to go unto him. At whose coming after the seven psalms and litany said (which whensoever she came unto him, ere he fell in talk of any worldly matter, he used accustomably to say

with her), among other communications he said unto her: 'I believe, Meg, that they that have put me here ween that they have done me a high displeasure; but I assure thee on my faith, mine own good daughter, if it had not been for my wife and ye that be my children, I would not have failed long ere this, to have closed myself in as strait a room and straiter too. But since I have come thither without mine own desert, I trust that God of his goodness will discharge me of my care, and with his gracious help supply my lack unto you. I find no cause, I thank God, Meg, to reckon myself in worse case here than at home, for methinks God maketh me a wanton and setteth me on his lap and dandleth me.' Thus by his gracious demeanour in tribulations appeared it, that all the troubles that ever chanced unto him by his patient sufferance thereof were to him no painful punishments, but of his patience profitable exercises."

A short time after his imprisonment he wrote the following beautiful letter to his daughter Margaret.

VII.

A letter written with a coal by Sir Thomas More to his daughter mistress Margaret Roper, within the while after he was prisoner in the Tower.

Mine own good daughter, Our Lord be thanked I am in good health of body, and in good quiet of mind: and of worldly things I no more desire than I have. I beseech him make you all merry in the hope of heaven. And such things as I somewhat longed to talk with you all, concerning the world to come, our Lord put them into your mind, as I trust he doth and better too by his holy spirit: who bless you and preserve you all. Written with a coal by your tender

loving father, who in his poor prayers forgetteth none of you all, nor your babes, nor your nurses, nor your good husbands, shrewd wives, nor father's shrewd wife neither, nor our other friends. And thus fare ye heartily well for lack of paper.

Thomas More, Knight.

Our Lord keep me continually true, faithful, and plain, to the contrary whereof I beseech him heartily never to suffer me live. For as for long life (as I have often told thee maid) I neither look for, not long for, but am well contented to go, if God calls me hence to-morrow. And I thank our Lord, I know no person living, that I would had one philippe for my sake: of which mind I am more glad than of all the world beside.

Recommend me to your shrewd Will, and mine other sons, and to John Harris my friend, and yourself knoweth to whom else, and to my shrewd wife above all, and God preserve you all and make and keep you his servants all.

VIII.

Within a while after Sir Thomas More was in prison in the Tower his daughter mistress Margaret Roper wrote and sent unto him a letter, wherein she seemed somewhat to labour to persuade him to take the oath (though she nothing so thought) to win thereby credence with Master Thomas Cromwell, that she might the rather get liberty to have free resort unto her

father (which she only had for the most time of his imprisonment) unto which letter her father wrote an answer. The copy whereof here followeth.

Our Lord Bless you.

If I had not been my dearly beloved daughter at a firm and fast point I trust in God's great mercy this good great while before, your lamentable letter had not a little abashed me surely far above all other things, of which I hear divers times not a few terrible toward me. Surely they all touched me never so near, nor were so grievous unto me, as to see you my well beloved child, in such vehement piteous manner, labour to persuade unto me, that thing wherein I have of pure necessity for respect unto mine own soul so often given you so precise answer before. Wherein as touching the points of your letter, I can make none answer. For I doubt not but you well remember, that the matters which moved my conscience (without declaration whereof I can nothing touch the points) I have sundry times showed you that I will disclose them to no man. And therefore daughter Margaret, I can in this thing no further, but like as you labour me again to follow your mind, to desire and pray you both again, to leave of such labour, and with my former answers to hold yourself content. A deadly grief unto me, and much more deadly than to hear of mine own death (for the fear thereof I thank our Lord, the fear of hell, the hope of heaven, and the passion of Christ daily more and more assuage) is, that I perceive my good son your husband, and you

my good daughter, and my good wife, and mine other good children and innocent friends in great displeasure and danger of great harm thereby. The let whereof while it lieth not in my hand, I can no further but commit all to God. *Nam in manu dei* (saith the scripture) *cor regis est, et sicut divisiones aquarii quocunque voluerit impellit illud.* Whose high goodness I most humbly beseech to incline the noble heart of the king's highness, too, to the tender favour of you all, and to favour me no better than God and myself know that my faithful heart towards him and my daily prayer for him, do deserve. For surely if his highness might inwardly see my true mind such as God knoweth it is, it would (I trust) soon assuage his high displeasure. Which while I can in this world never in such wise show, but that his grace may be persuaded to believe the contrary of me, I can no further go, but put all in the hands of him for fear of whose displeasure for the safeguard of my soul stirred by mine own conscience (without insectation, or reproach laying to any other man's) I suffer and endure this trouble. Out of which I beseech him to bring me, when his will shall be, into his endless bliss of heaven, and in the meanwhile, give me grace and you both in all our agony and trouble, devoutly to resort prostrate unto the remembrance of that bitter agony, which our Saviour suffered before his passion at the mount. And if we diligently so do, I verily trust we shall find therein great comfort and consolation. And thus my dear daughter the blessed spirit of Christ for his tender mercy govern and guide you all, to his pleasure and your weal and comforts both

body and soul. Your tender loving father Thomas More, Knight.

Margaret Roper to More.

To this last letter mistress Margaret Roper wrote an answer and sent it to Sir Thomas More her father the copy whereof here followeth.

Mine own good father, it is to me no little comfort, since I cannot talk with you by such means as I would, at the least way to delight myself among in this bitter time of your absence, by such means as I may, by as often writing to you, as shall be expedient, and by reading again and again your most fruitful and delectable letter, a faithful messenger of your very virtuous and ghostly mind, rid from all corrupt love of worldly things, and fast knit only in the love of God, and desire of heaven, as becometh a very true worshipper and a faithful servant of God, which I doubt not good father holdeth his holy hand over you, and shall (as he hath) preserve you both body and soul (*ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*) and namely, now when you have abjected all earthly consolations, and resigned yourself willingly gladly and fully, for his love, to his holy protection. Father, what think you hath been our comfort since your departing from us? Surely the experience we have had of your life past, and godly conversation, and wholesome counsel, and virtuous example, and a surety not only of the continuance of that same, but also of great increase by the

goodness of our Lord to the great rest and gladness of your heart devoid of all earthly dregs, and garnished with the noble vesture of heavenly virtue, a pleasant palace for the holy spirit of God to rest in, who defend you (as I doubt not good father but of his goodness he will) from all trouble of mind and of body, and give me your most loving obedient daughter and handmaid, and all us your children and friends, to follow that that we praise in you, and to our only comfort remember and coming together of you, that we may in conclusion meet with you mine own dear father in the bliss of heaven to which our most merciful Lord hath bought us with his precious blood.

Your own most loving obedient daughter and bedeswoman Margaret Roper, which desireth above all worldly things to be in John Wood's stead,[1] to do you some service. But we live in hope that we shall shortly receive you again, I pray God heartily we may, if it be his holy will.

IX.

Within a while after Sir Thomas More had been in prison in the Tower, his daughter mistress Margaret Roper obtained license, that she might resort unto her father in the Tower, which she did. And thereupon he wrote with a coal a letter to all his friends whereof a copy followeth.

[1] This John à Wood was his own servant that was suffered to be with him in prison, to be his servant there.

To all my loving friends.

Forasmuch as being in prison, I cannot tell what need I may have, or what necessity I may have to stand in, I heartily beseech you all, that if my well beloved daughter Margaret Roper (which only of all my friends hath by the king's gracious favour license to resort unto me) do anything desire of any of you, of such things as I shall have to need, that it may like you no less to regard and tender it, than if I moved it unto you and required it of you personally present myself. And I beseech you all to pray for me, and I shall pray for you.

Your faithful lover and poor bedesman
Thomas More, Knight, prisoner.

Here follow those two balletts which Sir Thomas More made for his pastime while he was prisoner in the Tower of London.

LEWYS THE LOST LOVER.

By flattering fortune, look thou never so fair,
Or never so pleasantly begin to smile,
As though thou wouldst my ruin all repair,
During my life thou shalt me not beguile.
Trust shall I God, to enter in awhile.
His haven of heaven sure and uniform.
Ever after thy calm, look I for a storm.

DAVY THE DYCER.

Long was I lady Lucke your serving man,
And now have lost again all that I gat,

Wherefore when I think on you now and then,
And in my mind remember this and that,
Ye may not blame me though I beshrew you cat,
But in faith I bless you again a thousand times,
For lending me now some leisure to make rymes.

Lady Alington to Margaret Roper.

In August in the year of our Lord 1534 and in the xxvi year of the reign of King Henry the eight, Lady Alyce Alington (wife to Sir Gyles Alington Knight, and daughter to Sir Thomas More's second and last wife) wrote a letter to mistress Margaret Roper, the copy whereof here followeth.

Sister Roper, with all my heart I recommend me unto you, thanking you for all kindness. The cause of my writing at this time is, to show you that at my coming home, within ii hours after, my lord Chancellor did come to take a course of a buck in our park, the which was to my husband a great comfort, that it would please him so to do. Then when he had taken his pleasure and killed his deer,he went to SirThomas Barnestrons to bed where I was the next day with him at his desire, that which I could not say nay to, for methought he did bid me heartily: and most especially, because I would speak to him for my father. And when I saw my time, I did desire him as humbly as I could, that he would (as I have heard say that he hath been) be still good lord unto my father. First he answered me that he would be as glad to do for him as for his father, and that (he said) did appear very

well, when the matter of the nun was laid to his charge. And as for this other matter, he marvelled that my father was so obstinate in his own conceit, in that that everybody went forth withal, save only the blind bishop and he.

And in good faith (said my lord) I am very glad that I have no learning, but in a few of Æsop's fables, of the which I shall tell you one. There was a country in the which there were almost none but fools, saving a few which were wise and they by their wisdom knew that there should fall a great rain, the which should make them all fools, that should be fouled or wet therewith. They seeing that, made them caves under the ground, till all the rain was past. Then they came forth, thinking to make the fools do what they list, and to rule them as they would. But the fools would none of that, but would have the rule themselves for all their craft. And when the wise men saw that they could not obtain their purpose, they wished that they had been in the rain, and had defiled their clothes with them. When his tale was told, my lord did laugh very merrily.

Then I said to him, that for all his merry fable, I did put no doubts, but that he would be good lord unto my father when he saw his time. He said, I would not have your father so scrupulous of his conscience. And then he told me another fable of a lion, an ass and a wolf, and of their confession.

First the lion confessed that he had devoured all the beasts he could come by. His confessor assoiled him, because he was a king, and also it was his nature to do so. Then came the poor

ass, and said that he took but one straw out of his master's shoe for hunger, by that means whereof he thought that his master did take cold. His confessor could not assoil this great trespass, but by and by sent him to the bishop. Then came the wolf and made his confession, and he was straitly commanded that he should not pass vi pence at a meal. But when the said wolf had used this diet a little while he wared very hungry, in so much that on a day when he saw a cow with her calf come by him, he said to himself, I am very hungry, and fain would I eat, but that I am bound by my ghostly father. Notwithstanding that my conscience shall judge. And then if that be so, then shall my conscience be thus that the cow doth seem to me now but worth a groat. And then if the cow be but worth a groat, then is the calf worth ii pence. So did the wolf eat both the cow and the calf. Now my good sister hath not my lord told me two pretty fables. In good faith they pleased me nothing, nor I wist not what to say, for I was abashed at his answer. And I see no better suit than to Almighty God. For he is the comforter of all sorrows, and will not fail to send his comfort to his servants when they have most need. Thus fare ye well mine own good sister. Written the Monday after St. Laurence, in haste,

Your sister Alice Alington.

Margaret Roper to Lady Alington.

Father Bridgett writes of the interview between More and his daughter Margaret Roper recorded in the fol-

lowing letter. "I doubt whether, in the Acts of the Martyrs, there is a nobler scene than this."

When mistress Roper had received this letter, she at her next repair to her father in the Tower showed him this letter. And what communication was thereupon between her father and her, ye shall perceive by an answer here following (as written to the lady Alington). But whether this answer were written by Sir Thomas More in his daughter Roper's name, or by herself, it is not certainly known.

When I came next unto my father after, methought it both convenient and necessary, to show him your letter. Convenient, that he might thereby see your loving labour taken for him. Necessary, that since he might perceive thereby, that if he stands still in this scruple of his conscience, (as it is at the leastwise called by many that are his friends and wise) all his friends that seem most able to do him good, either shall finally forsake him, or peradventure not be able indeed to do him any good at all. And for these causes at my next being with him after your letter received, when I had awhile talked with him, first of his diseases both in his breast of old and his reins now, by reason of gravel and stone, and of the cramp also at divers nights grippeth him in his legs, and that I found by his words that they were not much increased, but continued after their manner that they did before, sometime very sore and sometime little grief, and that at that time I found him out of pain, and as one in his case might, metely well-minded, after our vii. Psalms and the litany said, to sit and

talk and be merry, beginning first with other things, of the good comfort of my mother, and the good order of my brother and all my sisters, disposing themself every day more and more to set little by the world, and draw more and more to God, and that his household, his neighbours, and other good friends abroad, diligently remembered him in their prayers, I added unto this: "I pray God good father that their prayers and ours and your own therewith, may purchase of God the grace, that you may in this great matter (for which you stand in this trouble, and for your trouble all we also that love you) take such a way by time, as standing with the pleasure of God, may content and please the king, whom ye have always found so singularly gracious unto you, that if ye should stiffly refuse to do the thing that were his pleasure, which God not displeased you might do (as many great wise and well learned men say that in this thing you may) it would both be a great blot in your worship in every wise man's opinion, and as myself have heard some say (such as yourself have alway taken for well learned and good) of peril unto your soul also. But as for that point (father) will I not be bold to dispute upon, since I trust in God and your good mind that ye will look surely thereto. And your learning I know for such, that I wot well you can. But one thing is there which I and other your friends find and perceive abroad, which but if it be showed you, you may peradventure to your great peril, mistake, and hope for less harm (for as for good I wot well in this world of this matter ye look for none) than I sore fear me shall be likely to fall to you. For I assure you father,

I have received a letter of late from my sister Alington, by which I see well that if ye change not your mind, you are likely to lose all those friends that are able to do you any good. Or if ye lose not their good wills, you shall at the leastwise lose the effect thereof, for any good that they should be able to do you."

With this my father smiled upon me and said: "What mistress Eve! (as I called you when you came first) hath my daughter Alington played the serpent with you, and with a letter set you awork to come tempt your father again, and for the favour that you bear him labour to make him swear against his conscience, and send him to the devil?" And after that, he looked sadly again, and earnestly said unto me: "Daughter Margaret, we two have talked this thing ofter than twice or thrice. And the same tale in effect, that you tell me now therein, and the same fear too, have you twice told me before, and I have twice answered you too, that in this matter if it were possible for me to do the thing that might content the king's grace, and God therewith not offended, there hath no man taken this oath already more gladly than I would do: As he that reckoneth himself more deeply bounden unto the king's highness, for his most singular bounty, many ways showed and declared, than any of them all beside. But since standing (by) my conscience I can in no wise do it; and that for the instruction of my conscience in the matter, I have not flightily looked, but by many years studied and advisedly considered, and never could yet see nor hear the thing, nor I think I never shall, that could induce my own mind to think otherwise than I do. I have no manner remedy, but

God hath given me to that strait, that either I must deadly displease him, or abide any worldly harm that he shall for mine other sins, under name of this thing suffer to fall upon me. Whereof (as I before this have told you too) I have ere I came here, not left unbethought nor unconsidered, the very worst and the uttermost that can by possibility fall. And albeit that I know mine own frailty full well, and the natural faintness of mine own heart, yet if I had not trusted that God should give me strength rather to endure all things, than offend him by swearing ungodly against mine own conscience, you may be very sure I would not have come here. And since I look in this matter but only unto God, it maketh me little matter, though men call it as it please them, and say it is no conscience but a foolish scruple."

At this word I took a good occasion, and said unto him thus: "In good faith father for my part I neither do, nor it cannot become me, either to mistrust your good mind or your learning. But because you speak of that that some calleth but scruple, I assure you you shall see by my sister's letter, that one of the greatest estates in this realm, and a man learned too and (as I dare say yourself shall think when you know him, and as you have already right effectually proved him) your tender friend and very special good lord for a right simple scruple. And you may be sure he saith it of good mind, and lieth no little cause. For he saith that where you say your conscience moveth you to this, all the nobles of this realm and almost all other men too, go boldly forth with the contrary, and stick not

thereat, save only yourself and one other man: whom though he be right good and very well learned too, yet would I ween few that love you, give you the counsel against all other men, to lean to his mind alone."

And with this word I took him your letter, that he might see my words were not feigned, but spoken of his mouth, whom he much loveth and esteemeth highly. Thereupon he read over your letter. And when he came to the end, he began it afresh and read it all over again. And in the reading he made no manner haste, but advised it leisurely, and pointed every word.

And after that he paused, and then thus he said. "Far forth daughter Margaret, I find my daughter Alington such as I have ever found her, and I trust ever shall, as naturally minding me as you that are mine own. Howbeit, her take I verily for mine own too, since I have married her mother and brought up her of a child as I have brought up you, in other things and in learning both, wherein I thank God she findeth now some fruit, and bringeth her own up very virtuously and well. Whereof God I thank him hath sent her good store, our Lord preserve them and send her much joy of them, and my good son her gentle husband too, and have mercy on the soul of mine other good son, her first: I am daily bedesman (and so write her) for them all. In this matter, she hath used herself like herself, wisely and like a very daughter towards me, and in the end of her letter, giveth as good counsel as any man the wit had would with. God give me grace to follow it, and God reward her for it."

"Now daughter Margaret as for my lord, I not only think, but have also found it, that he is undoubtedly my singular good lord. And in mine other business concerning the silly nun, as my cause was good and clear, so was he my good lord therein, and Master Secretary my good master too. For which I shall never cease to be faithful bedesman for them both, and daily do I by my truth pray for them as I pray for myself. And whensoever it should happen (which I trust in God shall never happen) that I be found other than a true man to my prince, let them never favour me neither of them both, not of truth it could become them to do. But in this matter Meg to tell the truth between thee and me, my lord's Æsop's Fables do not greatly move me. But as his wisdom for his pastime told them merely to mine one daughter, so shall I for my pastime answer them to thee Meg that art mine other."

"The first fable of the rain that washed away all their wits which stood abroad when it fell, I have heard oft ere this: it was a tale so often told among the King's Counsel by my lord Cardinal when his grace was Chancellor, that I cannot lightly forget it. For of truth in times past when variance began to fall between the Emperor and the French king, in such wise that they were likely, and did indeed, fall together at war, and that there were in the Council here sometimes sundry opinions, in which some were of the mind that they thought it wisdom, that we should sit still and let them alone: But ever more against that way, my lord used this fable of those wise men, that because they would not be washed

with the rain that should make all the people fools, went themselves in caves, and hid them under the ground. When the rain had once made all the remnant fools, and that they came out of their caves and would utter their wisdom, the fools agreed together against them, and there all (therewithal) to beat them. And so said his grace, that if we would be so wise that we would sit in peace while the fools fought, they would not fail after to make peace and agree and fall at length all upon us. I will not dispute upon his grace's counsel and I trust we never made war but as reason would. But yet this fable for his part, did in his days help the king and the realm to spend many a fair penny. But that gear is past, and his grace is gone, our Lord assoil his soul."

"And therefore shall I now come to this Æsop's fable, as my lord full merrily laid it forth for me. If those wise men, Meg, when the rain was gone at their coming abroad, where they found all men fools, wished themselves fools too, because they could not rule them, then seemeth it that the foolish rain was so sore a shower, that even through the ground it sank into their cave, and poured down upon their heads, and wet them to the skin, and made them more nodies than them that stood abroad. For if they had had any wit, they might well see, that though they had been fools too, that thing would not have sufficed, to make them the rulers over the other fools, no more than the other fools over them: and of so many fools all might not be rulers. Now when they longed so sore to bear a rule among fools, that so they so might, they would be glad to leave their

wit and be fools too, the foolish rain had washed them metely well. Howbeit, to say the truth, before the rain came, if they thought that all the remnant should turn into fools, and then either were so foolish that they would, or so mad to think that they should, so few, rule so many fools, and had not so much wit, as to consider that there are none so unruly as they that lack wit and are fools, then were these wise men stark fools before the rain came. Howbeit daughter Roper, whom my lord here taketh for the wise men, and whom he meaneth to be fools, I cannot very well guess, I cannot read well such riddles. For Davus saith in Terence: *Non sum Oedipus*. I may say you wot well: *Non sum Oedipus sed Morus*, which name of mine what it signifieth in Greek I need not tell you. But I trust my lord reckoneth me among the fools, and so reckon I myself, as my name is in Greek. And I find, I thank God, causes not a few, wherefore I so should in very deed. But surely among those that long to be rulers, God and mine own conscience clearly knoweth that no man may truly number and reckon me. And I ween each other man's conscience can tell himself the same, since it is so well known that of the king's great goodness, I was one of the greatest rulers in this noble realm, and that at mine own great labour by his great goodness discharged. But whosoever my lord mean for the wise men, and whosoever his lordship take for the fools, and whomsoever long for the rule, and whosoever long for none, I beseech our Lord make us all so wise as that we may every man here so wisely rule ourself, in this time of tears, this vale of misery, this

simple wretched world (in which as Boece saith, One man to be proud that he beareth rule over other men, is much like as one mouse would be proud to bear rule over other mice in a barn) God, I say, give us the grace so wisely to rule ourself here, that when we shall hence in haste to meet the great spouse we be not taken sleepers, and for lack of light in our lamp shut out heaven among the five foolish virgins."

"The second fable, Marget, seemeth not to be Æsop's. For by that the matter goeth all upon confession, it seemeth to be fained since christendom began. For in Greece before Christ's days they used not confession, no more the men then, than the beasts now. And Æsop was a Greek and died long ere Christ were born. But what man who made it maketh little matter. Nor I envy not that Æsop hath that name. But surely it is somewhat too subtle for me. For whom his lordship understandeth by the lion and the wolf, which both twain confessed themself of ravin and devouring of all that came to their hands, and the one that enlarged his conscience at his pleasure in the construction of his penance, or whom by the good discreet confession that enjoined the one a little penance, and the tother none at all, and sent the poor Ass to the bishop, of all these things can I nothing tell. But by the foolish scrupulous Ass, that had so sore a conscience, for the taking of a straw for hunger out of his master's shoe, my lord's other words of my scruple declare that his lordship merely meant that by (for) me: signifying (as it seemeth by that similitude) that of oversight and folly, my scrupulous conscience taketh for a great

perilous thing toward my soul, if I should swear this oath, which thing as his lordship thinketh were indeed but a trifle. And I suppose well Margaret as you told me right now, that so think many more beside as well spiritual as temporal, and that even of those, that for their learning and their virtue, myself not a little esteem. And yet albeit that I suppose this to be true, yet believe I not even very surely, that every man so thinketh that so saith. But though they did daughter, that would not make much to me, not though I should see my lord of Rochester say the same, and sware the oath himself before me too. But whereas you told me right now that such as love me, would not advise me, that against all other men, I should lean unto his mind alone, verily daughter no more I did. For albeit that of very truth, I have him in the reverent estimation, that I reckon in this realm no one man, in wisdom, learning and long approved virtue together, mete to be matched and compared with him, yet that in this matter I was not led by him, very well and plain appeareth, both in that I refused the oath before it was offered him and in that also that his lordship was content to have sworn of that oath (as I perceived since by you when you moved me to the same) either somewhat more, or in some other manner than ever I minded to do. Verily daughter I never intend (God being my good Lord) to pin my soul at another man's back, not even the best man that I know this day living for I know not whither he may hap to carry it. There is no man living, of whom while he liveth, I may make myself sure. Some may do for favour, and some may do for fear, and so might

they carry my soul the wrong way. And some might hap to frame himself a conscience, and think that while he did it for fear, God would forgive it. And some may peradventure think that they will repent and be shriven thereof, and that so shall God remit it them. And some may be peradventure of that mind, that if they say one thing and think the while the contrary, God more regardeth their heart than their tongue, and that therefore their oath goeth upon that they think, and not upon that they say: as a woman reasoned once. I trow daughter you were by. But in good faith, Marget, I can use no such ways in so great a matter: but like as if mine own conscience served me, I would not let to do it though other men refused, so though other refuse it not, I dare not do it, mine own conscience standing against me. If I had (as I told you) looked but lightly for the matter, I should have cause to fear. But now have I so looked for it and so long, that I purpose at the leastwise to have no less regard unto my soul, than had once a poor honest man of the country, that was called Cumpanye."

And with this, he told me a tale, I ween that I can scant tell it you again, because it hangeth upon some terms and ceremonies of the law. But as far as I can call to mind my father's tale was this. That there is a court belonging of course unto every fair, to do justice in such things as happen within the same. This court hath a pretty fond name, but I cannot happen on it: but it beginneth with a Pye,[1] and the

[1] The Court of Pie-powder ("pieds poudrés"), the summary court of justice at fairs.

remnant goeth much like the name of a knight that I have known I wis and I trow you too, for he hath been at my father's ere this, at such time as you were there, a metely tall black man, his name was sir William Pounder. But tut let the name of the court go for this once, or call it if ye will a court of Pye sir William Pounder. But this was the matter lo, that upon a time at such a court holden at Bartylmewe fair, there was escheator of London that had arrested a man that was outlawed, and had seized his goods that he had brought into the fair, tolling[1] him out of the fair by a train.[2] The man that was arrested and his goods seized was a northern man, which by his friends made the escheator within the fair to be arrested, upon an action, I wot not what and so was he brought before the judge of the court of Pye sir William Pounder. And at the last the matter came to a certain ceremony to be tried by a quest of twelve men, a jury as I remember they call it or else a perjury. Now had the cloth man by friendship of the officers found the means to have all the quest almost, made of the northern men, such as had their booths there standing in the fair. Now was it come to the last day in the afternoon, and the twelve men that heard both the parties and their counsel tell their tales at the bar, and were from the bar had into a place, to talk and commune, and agree upon their sentence. Nay, let me speak better in my terms yet, I trow the judge giveth the sentence, and the quest's tale is called a verdict. They were scant come in together, but the northern

[1] Enticing. [2] A trick.

were agreed and in effect all the other too to cast our London escheator. They thought there needed no more to prove that he did wrong, than even the name of his bare office alone. But there was among them as the devil would, this honest man of another quarter that was called Cumpany. And because the fellow seemed but a fool, and sat still and said nothing, they made no reckoning of him, but said we be agreed now, come let us go give our verdict. Then when that poor fellow saw that they made such haste, and his mind nothing gave him that way that theirs did (if their minds gave them that way that they said) he prayed them to tarry and talk upon the matter, and tell him such reason therein, that he might think as they did: And when he should so do, he would be glad to say with them or else he said they must pardon him. For since he had a soul of his own to keep as they had, he must say as he thought for his, as they must for theirs. When they heard this, they were half angry with him. What good fellow (quod one of the northern men) Whare wonnes[1] thou? Be we not eleven here and all alone[2] thou be but one, and all we agreed? Whereto wouldst thou stick? What is thy name good fellow? Master (quod he) My name is called Cumpany. Cumpany, quod they, Now by thy truth good fellow play then the good companion, come thereon forth with us, and pass even for good company. Would God, good masters, quod the man again, that there lay no more weight thereon. But now

[1] Livest.

[2] The original text reads: "thou ne but ene la alene."

when we shall hence and come before God, and that he shall send you to heaven for doing according to your conscience, and me to the devil for doing against mine, in passing at your request here for good company now, by God Master Dykonson (that was one of the northern men's names) if I shall then say to you all again, Masters I went once for good company with you, which is the cause that I go now to hell, play you the good fellows now again with me, as I went then for good company with you, so some of you go now for good company with me. Would you go, Master Dikonson? Nay, Nay, By our Lady, nor never one of you all. And therefore must ye pardon me from passing as you pass, but if I thought in the matter as you do, I dare not in such a matter pass for good company. For the passage of my poor soul passeth all good company.

And when my father had told me this tale, then said he further thus: "I pray thee now, good Margaret, tell me this, Wouldst thou wish thy poor father being at the leastwise something learned, less to regard the peril of his soul than did there that honest unlearned man? I meddle not (you wot well) with conscience of any man that hath sworn: nor I take not upon me to be their judge. But now if they do well, and that their conscience grudged them not, if I with my conscience to the contrary, should for good company pass on with them and swear as they do, when all our souls hereafter shall pass out of this world, and stand in judgment at the bar before the high judge, if he judged them to heaven and me to the devil, because I did as they did,

not thinking as they thought, if I should then say (as the good man Cumpany said) Mine old good lords and friends, naming such a lord and such, yea and some bishops peradventure of such as I love best, I sware because you sware, and went that way that you went, do likewise for me now, let me not go alone, if there be any good fellowship with you, some of you come with me. By my truth Margaret I may say to thee in secret counsel, here between us twain (but let it go no further I beseech thee heartily) I find the friendship of this wretched world so fickle, that for any thing I could treat or pray, that would for good fellowship go to the devil with me, among them all I ween should I find not one. Then by God Margaret if ye think so too, best it is I suppose, that for any respect of me, all were they twice as many more as they be, I have myself a respect to mine own soul."

"Surely father," quod I, "without any scruple at all, you may be bold I dare say for to swear that. But father, they that think you should not refuse to swear the thing that you see so many good men and so well learned swear before you, mean not that you should swear to bear them fellowship, nor to pass with them for good company, but that the credence that you may with reason give to their persons for their aforesaid qualities, should well move you to think the oath such of itself, as every man may well swear without peril of their soul, if their own private conscience to the contrary be not the let: and that ye well ought and have good cause to change your own conscience, confirming your own conscience to the conscience of so many other, namely being such as you know they be.

And since it is also by a law made by the Parliament commanded, they think that you be upon the peril of your soul, bounden to change and reform your conscience, and confirm your own as I said unto other men's."

"Marry Marget (quod my father again) for the part that you play, you play it not much amiss. But Margaret, first, as for the law of the land, though every man being born and inhabiting therein is bounden to the keeping in every case upon some temporal pain, and in many cases upon pain of God's displeasure too, yet is there no man bound to swear that every law is well made, nor bound, upon the pain of God's displeasure, to perform any point of the law, as were indeed unlawful. Of which manner kind, that there may such hap to be made in any part of Christendom, I suppose no man doubteth, the General Council of the whole body of Christendom ever more in that point except; which though it may make some things better than other, and some things may grow to that point, that by another law they may need to be reformed, yet to institute anything in such wise to God's displeasure, as at the making might not lawfully be performed, the spirit of God that governeth his Church, never hath yet suffered, nor never hereafter shall, his whole Catholic Church lawfully gathered together in a General Council, as Christ hath made plain promises in scripture. Now if it so hap that in any particular part of Christendom, there be a law made, that be such, as for some part thereof some men think that the law of God cannot bear it, and some other think yes, the thing being in such manner in question,

throughout divers quarters of Christendom, some that are good men and cunning, both of our own days and before our days think some one way, and some other of like learning and goodness think the contrary, in this case he that thinketh against the law, neither may swear that law lawfully was made, standing his own conscience to the contrary, nor is bounden upon pain of God's displeasure to change his own conscience therein, for any particular made anywhere, other than by the General Council, or by a general faith grown by the working of God universally throughout all Christian nations: nor other authority than one of these twain (except special revelation and express commandment of God) since the contrary opinions of good men and well learned, as I put you the case, made the understanding of the scriptures doubtful, I can see none that lawfully may command and compel any man to change his own opinions, and to translate his own conscience from the one side to the tother."

"For an ensample of some such manner things, I have I trow before this time told you, that whether our Blessed Lady were conceived in original sin or not, was sometime in great question among the great learned men of Christendom. And whether it be yet decided and determined by any General Council, I remember not. But this I remember well that notwithstanding that the feast of her Conception was then celebrated (at the leastwise in divers provinces) yet was holy St. Bernard, which as his manifold books made in the laud and praise of our Lady to declare, was of his devout affection towards all things sowning[1]

[1] Tending.

towards her commendation, that he thought might well be verified or suffered, as any man was living, yet I say was that holy devout man, against that part of her praise, as appeareth well by epistle of his, wherein he writes sore and with great reason argueth there against, and approveth not the institution of that feast neither. Nor he was not of this mind alone, but many other well learned men with him, and right holy men too. Now was there on the other side, the blessed holy bishop St. Anselm, and he not alone neither, but many well learned and very virtuous also with him. And they be both twain holy saints in heaven, and many more that were on either side. Nor neither part was there bound to change their opinion for other, nor for any provincial Council either. But like as after the determination of a well assembled General Council every man had been bounden to give credence that way, and confirm their own conscience to the determination of the Council General, and then all they that held the contrary before, were for that holding out of blame, so if before such decision a man had against his own conscience, sworn to maintain and defend the other side, he had not failed to offend God very sore."

"But marry, if on the other side a man would in a matter take away by himself upon his own mind alone, or with some few, or with never so many, against an evident truth appearing by the common faith of Christendom, this conscience is very damnable. Yea, or if it be not even fully so plain and evident, yet if he see by himself with far the fewer part, think the one way, against far the more part of as

well learned and as good, as those are that affirm the thing that he thinketh, thinking and affirming the contrary, and that of such folk as he hath no reasonable cause wherefore he should not in that matter suppose, that those which say they think against his mind, affirm the thing that they say, for none other cause but for that they so think indeed, this is of very truth a very good occasion to move him, and yet not to compel him, to conform his mind and conscience unto theirs."

"But Margaret, for what causes I refuse the oath, that thing (as I have often told you) I will never show you, neither you nor no body else, except the king's highness should like to command me. Which if his grace did, I have ere this told you therein how obediently I have said. But surely daughter I have refused it and do, for more causes than one. And for what causes soever I refuse it, this am I sure, that it is well known, that of them that have sworn it, some of the best learned before the oath given them, said and plain affirmed the contrary of some such things as they have now sworn in the oath, and that upon their truth and their learning then, and that not in haste nor suddenly, but often and after great diligence done to seek and find out the truth."

"That might be father (quod I) and yet since they might see more." "I will not (quod he) dispute daughter Margaret against that, nor misjudge any other man's conscience, which lieth in their own heart far out of my sight. But this will I say, that I never heard myself the cause of their change, by any new further thing found

of authority, than as far as I perceive they had looked on and as I suppose, very well weighed before. Now if the self same things that they saw before, seem some otherwise unto them now than they did before, I am for their sakes the gladder a great deal. But anything that ever I saw before, yet at this day to me they seem but as they did. And therefore, though they may do otherwise than they might, yet daughter I may not. As for such things as some men would haply say, that I might with reason the less regard their change, for any sample of them to be taken to the change of my conscience, because that the keeping of the prince's pleasure, and the avoiding of his indignation, the fear of the losing of their worldly substance, with regard unto the discomfort of their kindred and their friends, might hap make some men either sware otherwise than they think, or frame their conscience astretch to think otherwise than they thought, any such opinion such as this is, will I not conceive of them. I have better hope of their goodness, than to think of them so. For if such things should have turned them, the same things had been likely to make me to the same: for in good faith I knew few so faint hearted as myself. Therefore will I, Margaret, by my will, think no worse of other folk in the thing that I know not, than I find in myself. But as I know well mine only conscience causeth me to refuse the oath, so will I trust in God, that according to their conscience they have received it and sworn. But whereas you think Margaret, that they be so many, more than there are on the other side that think in this thing as I think, surely for your own

comfort that you shall not take thought, thinking that your father casteth himself away so like a fool, that he would jeopard the loss of his substance, and peradventure his body, without any cause why he so should for peril of his soul, but rather his soul in peril thereby too, to this shall I say to thee Margaret, that in some of my causes I nothing doubt at all, but that though not in this realm, yet in Christendom about, of those well learned men and virtuous that are yet alive, they be not the fewer part that are of my mind. Besides that, that it were ye wot well possible that some men in this realm too, think not so clear the contrary, as by the oath received they have sworn to say. Now thus far forth I say for them that are yet alive. But go me now to them that are dead before, and that are I trust in heaven, I am sure that it is not the fewer part of them, that all the time while they live, thought in some of the things the way that I think now. I am also Margaret of this thing sure enough, that of those holy doctors and saints, which to be with God in heaven long ago no good Christian man doubteth, whose books yet at this day remain here in men's hands, there thought in some such things as I think now. I say not that they thought all so, but surely such as so many as will well appear by their writings, that I pray God give me the grace that my soul may follow theirs. And yet I show you not all Margaret that I have for myself in the sure discharge of my conscience."

"But for the conclusion, daughter Margaret, of all this matter, as I have often told you, I take not upon me neither to define nor to dispute in

these matters, nor I rebuke not nor impugn any other man's deed, nor I never wrote, nor so much as spake in any company, any word of reproach in anything that the Parliament had passed, nor I meddled not with the conscience of any man, that either thinketh or saith he thinketh contrary unto mine. But as concerning mine own self, for thy comfort shall I say daughter unto thee, that mine own conscience in this matter (I damn none other man's) is such, as may well stand with mine own salvation, thereof am I Meg as sure, as that is, God is in heaven. And therefore as for all the remnant, goods, lands, and life both, (if that chance should so fortune) since this conscience is sure for me, I verily trust in God, He shall rather strengthen me to bear the loss, than against this conscience to swear and put my soul in peril, since all the causes that I perceive move other men to the contrary, seem not such unto me as in my conscience make any change."

When he saw me sit with this very sad, as I promise you sister my heart was full heavy for the peril of his person, for in faith I fear not his soul, he smiled upon me and said: "How now daughter Margaret? What now mother Eve? Where is your mind now? Sit not musing with some serpent in your breast, upon some new persuasion to offer father Adam the apple yet once again?"

"In good faith father quod I, I can no further go but am (as I trow Cressid saith in Chaucer) comen to Dulcarnon even at my wit's end. For since the ensample of so many wise men, cannot in this matter move you, I see not what to say more, but if I should

look to persuade you with the reason that Master Harry Patenson[1] made. For he met one day one of our men, and when he had asked where you were, and heard that you were in the Tower still, he wared[2] even angry with you and said: 'Why? What aileth him that he will not swear? Wherefore should he stick to swear? I have sworn the oath myself.' And so I can in good faith go now no further neither, after so many wisemen whom ye take for no sample, but if I should say like Master Harry: 'Why should you refuse to swear father? For I have sworn myself.'"[3]

At this he laughed and said. "That word was like Eve too, for she offered Adam no worse fruit than she had eaten herself."

"But yet father quod I by my truth, I fear me very sore, that this matter will bring you in marvellous heavy trouble. You know well that as I showed you, Master Secretary sent you word as your very friend, to remember, that the Parliament lasted yet."

"Margaret quod my father, I thank him right heartily. But as I showed you then again, I left not this gear unthought of. And albeit I know well that if they would make a law to do me any harm, that law could never be lawful, but that God shall I trust keep me in that grace that concerning my duty to my prince, no man shall do me hurt but if he do me wrong (and then as I told you,

[1] More's fool.

[2] Waxed.

[3] Margaret Roper had taken the oath with a reservation.

this is like a riddle, a case in which a man may lose his head and have no harm). And notwithstanding also that I have good hope, that God shall never suffer so good and wise a prince, in such wise to requite the long service of his true faithful servant, yet since there is nothing unpossible to fall I forgat not in this matter, the counsel of Christ in the Gospel, that ere I should begin to build this castle for the safeguard of mine own soul, I should sit and reckon what the charge would be. I counted Margaret full surely many a restless night, while my wife slept, and wente[1] I had slept too, what peril were possible for to fall to me, so far forth I am sure that there can come none above. And in devising daughter thereupon, I had a full heavy heart. But yet I thank our Lord for all that, I never thought to change, though the very uttermost should hap me that my fear ran upon."

"No father (quod I) it is not like to think upon a thing that may be, and to see a thing that shall be, as ye should (our Lord save you) if the chance should so fortune. And then should you peradventure think, that you think not now, and yet then peradventure it would be too late."

"Too late daughter (quod my father) Margaret? I beseech our Lord, that if ever I make such a change, it may be too late indeed. For well I wot the change cannot be good for my soul, that change I say that should grow but by fear. And therefore I pray God that in this world I never have good of such change. For so much as I take harm here, I shall have at the leastwise the less therefore when I am hence. And

[1] Thought.

if it so were that I wist well now, that I should faint and fall, and for fear swear hereafter, yet would I wish to take harm by the refusing first: for so should I have the better hope for grace to rise again. And albeit Margaret that I wot well my lewdness hath been such: that I know myself well worthy that God should let me slip, yet can I not but trust in his merciful goodness, that as his grace hath strengthened me hitherto, and made me content in my heart, to lose, goods, land and life too, rather than to swear against my conscience, and hath also put in the king toward me that good and gracious mind, that as yet he hath taken from me nothing but my liberty, wherewith (as help me God) his grace hath done me great good by the spiritual profit that I trust I take thereby, that among all his great benefits heaped upon me so thick, I reckon, upon my faith, my prisonment, even the very chief. I cannot I say therefore distrust the grace of God, but that either he shall conserve me and keep the king in that gracious mind still, to do me none hurt, or else if his pleasure be, that for mine other sins I shall suffer in such a case in sight as I shall not deserve, his grace shall give me the strength to take it patiently, and peradventure somewhat gladly too, whereby his high goodness shall (by the merits of his bitter passion joined thereunto, and far surmounting in merit for me all that I can suffer myself) make it serve for release of my pain in Purgatory, and over that for increase of some reward in heaven. Mistrust him Meg will I not, though I feel me faint. Yea and though I should feel my fear even at point to overthrow me too, yet shall I remember

how St. Peter with a blast of a wind, began to speak for his faint faith, and shall do as he did, call upon Christ and pray him to help. And then I trust he shall set his holy hand unto me, and in the stormy seas, hold me up from drowning. Yea and if he suffer me to play St. Peter further, and to fall full to the ground, and swear and forswear too, (which our Lord for his tender passion keep me from, and let me lose if it so fall, and never win thereby:) yet after shall I trust that his goodness will cast upon me his tender piteous eye, as he did upon St. Peter, and make me stand up again, and confess the truth of my conscience afresh, and abide the shame and the harm here of mine own fault."

"And finally, Marget, this wot I very well, that without my fault he will not let me be lost. I shall therefore with good hope commit myself wholly to him. And if he suffer for my faults to perish, yet shall I then serve for a praise of his justice. But in good faith Meg, I trust that his tender pity shall keep my poor soul safe and make me commend his mercy. And therefore mine own good daughter, never trouble thy mind, for anything that ever shall hap me in this world. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best."

"And with this my good child I pray you heartily, be you and all your sisters and my sons too, comfortable and serviceable to your good mother my wife. And of your good husbands minds I have no manner doubt. Commend me to them all, and to my good daughter Alington, and to all my other

friends, sisters, nieces, nephews and allies, and unto all our servants, man, woman and child, and all my good neighbours and our acquaintance abroad. And I right heartily, pray both you and them to serve God and be merry and rejoice in him. And if anything hap me that you would be loath, pray to God for me, but trouble not yourself: as I shall full heartily pray for us all, that we may meet together once in heaven, where we shall make merry for ever, and never have trouble after."

X.

A letter written and sent by Sir T. More to Master doctor Nicholas Wylson (then both prisoners in the Tower of London) in the year of our Lord God, 1534. And in the xxvi year of the reign of king Henry the eight.

Our Lord be your comfort. And whereas I perceive by sundry means, that you have promised to swear the oath, I beseech our Lord give you there of good luck. I never gave any man counsel to the contrary in my days, nor never used any ways to put any scruple in other folks conscience concerning the matter. And whereas I perceive that you would gladly know what I intend to do, you wot well that I told you when we were both abroad, that I would therein neither know your mind nor no man's else: nor you nor no man else should therein know mine. For I would be no parte taker with no man, nor of truth never I will: but leaving every other man to their

own conscience, myself will with God's grace follow mine own. For against mine own to swear, were peril of my damnation. And what mine own shall be tomorrow, myself cannot be sure. And whether I shall have finally the grace to do according to mine own conscience or not, hangeth in God's goodness and not in mine, to whom I beseech you heartily remember me in your devout prayers, and I shall and daily do remember you in mine, such as they be. And as long as my poor short life shall last, any thing that I have your part shall be therein.

XI.

Another letter written and sent by Sir Thomas More to Master doctor Wilson (then both prisoners in the Tower) in the year of our Lord 1534. And in the xxvi year of the reign of king Henry the eight.

Good Master Wilson in my right hearty wise I recommend me to you. And very sorry am I to see you, beside the trouble that you be in by this imprisonment, with loss of liberty, goods, revenues of your livelihood and comfort of your friends company, fallen also into such agony and vexation of mind, through doubts falling in your mind, diversely to and fro toss and trouble your conscience, to your great heaviness of heart, as I (to no little grief of mine own mind for your sake) perceive. And so much am I for you good, Master doctor, the more sorry, for that it lieth not in

me, to give you such kind of comfort, as meseemeth you somewhat desire and look for at my hand. For whereas you would somewhat hear of my mind in your doubts, I am a man at this day very little meet therefore. For this you know well, good Master doctor, that at such times as the matter came in such manner in question, as mine opinion was asked therein among other, and yet you made privy thereunto before me, you remember well, that at that time, you and I many times talked together thereof. And by all the time after, in which I did at the king's gracious commandment both seek out and read, and commune with all such as I knew made privy to the matter, to perceive what I might therein, upon both the sides, and by indifferent weighing of everything, as near as my poor wit and learning would serve me, to see to which side my conscience would incline, and as mine own mind should give me, so to make his highness report which way myself should have to think therein.

For other commandments had I never of his grace in good faith, saving that this knot his highness added thereto, that I should therein look first unto God, and after God unto him: which word was also the first lesson that his grace gave me what time I came first into his noble service, and neither a more indifferent commandment nor a more gracious lesson, could there in my mind never king give his counsellor or any his other servants. But (as I began to tell you) by all this long time (I cannot tell you now how many years) of all those that I talked with of the matter, and with whom I most conferred those places of scripture, and of the

old holy doctors that touched either the one side or the other, with the counsels and laws that spoke thereof also, the most (as I trow you wot well) was yourself. For with no man communed I so much and so often thereof as with you, both for your substantial learning and for your mature judgment, and for that I well perceived ever in you, that no man had or likely could have a more faithful respect into the king's honour and surety both of body and soul, than I ever saw that you had.

And yet among many other things that I well liked in you, one specially was, that I perceived from the thing that the king's grace did put you in trust with, your substantial secret manner. For whereas I had heard (I wot nere now of whom) that you had written his highness a book of that matter from Paris before, yet in all those years of our long acquaintance, and often talking and reasoning upon the thing, I never heard you so much as make once any mention of that book. But else (except there were any other things in that book that you peradventure thought not on) I suppose that all that ever came to your mind, that might in the matter make for the one side or the other, comprised either in the scripture or in the old ancient doctors, I verily think in my mind that you did communicate with me, and I likewise with you. And at the leastwise I remember well, that of these points which now you call newly to your remembrance, there was none at that time forgotten. I remember well also, by our often conference in the matter, that by all the time in which I studied about it, you and I were in every point both twain of one

opinion. And I remember well, that the laws and counsels, and the words of St. Austin *de Civitate Dei*, and the Epistle of St. Ambrose *ad Paternam*, and the Epistle of St. Basil translated out of the Greek, and the writing of St. Gregory, you and I read together: and over that the places of the scripture's self, both in *Leviticus* and in the *Deuteronomy*, and in the Gospels, and in St. Paul's Pistles: and over this in that other place of St. Austin that you remember now: and beside that, other places of his wherein he properly toucheth the matter expressly, with the words of St. Jerome and of St. Chrysostom too: and I cannot now remember of how many more.

But I verily think that on your part, and I am very sure that on my part (albeit that it had been peradventure over long to show and read with you every man's book that I read by myself, whereto the parties peradventure that trusted me therewith, gave me no leave to show their books further, and you peradventure used the like manner with me) yet in good faith (as it was of reason my part in that case to do, you and I having both one commandment indifferently to consider the matter, everything of scripture and of the doctors, I faithfully communed with you: and as I suppose verily so did you with me. So that of me good Master doctor, though I had all the points as ripe in my mind now as I had then, and had still all the books about me that I had then, and were as willing to meddle in the matter as any man could be, yet could you now no new thing hear of me, more than you have, I ween, heard before: nor, I ween, I of you neither.

But now standeth it with me far in other case. For afterward when I had signified unto the king's highness mine own poor opinion in the matter (which his highness very graciously took in good part) and that I saw further progress in the matter, wherein do his grace service to his pleasure I could not, and anything meddle against his pleasure I would not, I determined with myself utterly to discharge my mind of any further studying or musing on the matter. And thereupon I sent home again such books as I had: saving some that I burned by the consent of the owner, that was minded as myself was, no more to meddle of the matter. And therefore now good Master doctor, at this time I could not be sufficient and able to reason those points again, though I were minded thereto, since many things are out of my mind, which I neither purpose to look for again, nor though I would, were never like to find again while I live. Besides this, all that ever I looked for, was (you wot well) concerning two or three questions to be pondered and weighed by the study of scripture and the interpreters of the same, save for somewhat that hath been touched in the same by the Canon Laws of the Church. But then were there at that time in the matter other things more, divers faults found in the bull of the dispensation, by which the king's counsel learned in the spiritual law, reckoned the bull vicious, partly by reason of untrue suggestion, partly by reason of suggestion unsufficient. Now concerning those points, I never meddled. For I neither understand the doctors of the law, nor well can turn their books. And many things have there since, in this great

matter, grown in question, wherein I neither am sufficiently learned in the law, nor full informed of the fact. And therefore I am not he, that either murmur or grudge, make assertions, hold opinions, or keep despicions[1] in the matter: but like the king's true poor humble subject, daily pray for the preservation of his grace, and the queen's grace, and their noble issue, and of all the realm, without harm doing or intending (I thank our Lord) unto any man living.

Finally as touching the oath, the causes for which I refused it, no man wotteth what they be. For they be secret in mine own conscience, some other peradventure, than those that other men would ween, and such as I never disclosed unto any man yet, nor never intend to do while I live. Finally as I said unto you, before the oath offered unto us, when we met in London at adventure, I would be no partaker in the matter, but for mine own self follow mine own conscience, for which myself must make answer unto God, and shall leave every other man unto his own, so say to you still, and I daresay further, that no more never intended any of you neither. Many things every man learned wotteth well there are, in which every man is at liberty without peril of damnation, to think which way him list, till the one part be determined for necessary to be believed, by a General Council. And I am not he that take upon me to define or determine, of what kind of nature everything is, that the oath containeth: nor am so bold or presumptuous to blame or dispraise the conscience of other men, their truth nor

[1] Suspicions.

their learning neither: nor I meddle of no man but of myself, nor of no man's conscience else will I meddle with but of mine own. And in mine own conscience (I cry God mercy) I find of mine own life matters enough to think upon. I have lived methinketh a long life, and now neither I look nor I long to live much longer. I have since I came in the Tower, looked once or twice to have given up my ghost ere this: and in good faith mine heart wared the lighter with hope thereof. Yet forget I not that I have a long reckoning and a great to give account of. But I put my trust in God, and in the mercies of his bitter passion, and I beseech him give me and keep me the mind, to long to be out of this world and to be with him. For I can never but trust, that whoso long to be with him, shall be welcome to him; and, on the other side, my mind giveth me verily, that any that ever shall come to him, shall full heartily wish to be with him, ere ever he shall come at him.

And I beseech him heartily to set your heart at such rest and quiet, as may be to his pleasure and eternal weal of your soul, and so I verily trust that he shortly shall, and that also if it be his pleasure, incline the king's noble heart to be gracious and favourable to you and me both, since we be both twain of true faithful mind unto him, whether we be in this matter of one mind both, or of divers. *Sicut divisiones aquarum, ita cor regis in manu domini, quocumque voluerit inclinavit illud.* And if the pleasure of God be, of any of us both otherwise to dispose, I need to give you no counsel or advice. But for myself, I most humbly beseech him

to give me the grace in such wise patiently to conform my mind unto his high pleasure therein, that after the troublous storm of this my tempestuous time, his great mercy may conduct me into the sure haven of the blissful joy of heaven, and after at his further pleasure (if I have any) all mine enemies too. For there shall we love together well enough: and I thank our Lord for my part, so do I here too. Be not angry now though I pray not like for you. You be sure enough I would my friends should fare no worse than they, nor yet they, so help me God, no worse than myself. For our Lord's sake good Master Wylson pray for me, for I pray for you daily, and sometime when I would be sorry but if I thought you were asleep. Comfort yourself good Master doctor, with remembering of God's great mercy, and the king's accustomed goodness. And by my truth I think that all his grace's Council favoureth you in their hearts. I cannot judge in my mind anyone of them so easy, as to be of the mind, that you should do otherwise than well. And for conclusion, in God is all. *Spes non confundit.*

I pray you pardon my scribbling, for I cannot all things so well endure to write as I write sometime. And I pray you when you see time convenient at your pleasure, send me this rude bill again. *Quia quanquam nihil inest mali, tamen propter ministrum nolim rescire.*

Margaret Roper to More.

A letter written and sent by Mistress Margaret Roper, to her father Sir T. More then shut up in close

prison in the Tower, written in the year of our Lord God 1534. And in the xxvi year of the reign of king Henry the eight, answering to a letter which her father had sent unto her.

Mine own most entirely beloved father, I think myself never able to give you sufficient thanks, for the inestimable comfort my poor heart received in the reading of your most loving and godly letter, representing to me the clear shining brightness of your soul, the pure temple of the holy spirit of God, which I doubt not shall perpetually rest in you and you in him.

Father, if all the world had been given to me, as I be saved, it had been a small pleasure, in comparison with the pleasure I conceived of the treasure of your letter, which though it were written with a coal is worthy in mine opinion to be written in letters of gold.

Father, What moved them to shut you up again, we can nothing hear. But surely I conjecture that when they considered that you were of so temperate mind, that you were contented to abide there all your life with such liberty, they thought it were never possible to incline you to their will, except it were by restraining you from the church, and the company of my good mother, your dear wife, and us your children and bedesfolk. But, father, this chance was not strange to you. For I shall not forget how you told us when we were with you in the garden, that these things were like enough to chance you shortly after.

Father, I have many times rehearsed to mine own comfort, and divers others, your fashion and words ye had to us when we were last with you: for which I trust, by the grace of God, to be the better while I live, and when I am departed out of this frail life, which I pray God I may pass and end in his true obedient service, after the wholesome counsel and fruitful example of living I have had (good father) of you, whom I pray God give me grace to follow: which I shall the better through the assistance of your devout prayers, the special stay of my frailty. Father I am sorry I have no longer leisure at this time to talk with you, the chief comfort of my life, I trust to have occasion to write again shortly. I trust I have your daily prayer and blessing.

Your most loving obedient daughter and bedeswoman Margaret Roper, which daily and hourly is bound to pray for you, for whom she prayeth in this wise, that our Lord of his infinite mercy give you of his heavenly comfort, and so assist you with his special grace, that ye never in anything decline from his blessed will, but live and die his true obedient servant. Amen.

XII.

A letter written and sent by Sir Thomas More, to his daughter Mistress Roper, answering her letter here next before.

The holy spirit of God be with you.

If I would with my writing (mine own good

daughter) declare how much pleasure and comfort, your daughterly loving letters were unto me, a pack of coals would not suffice to make me the pens. And other pens have I (good Margaret) none here, and therefore can I write you no long process, nor dare adventure good daughter to write often.

The cause of my close keeping again, did of likelihood grow of my negligent and very plain true word which you remember. And verily whereas my mind gave me (as I told you in the garden) that some such thing were likely to happen, so doth my mind alway give me, that some folk yet ween that I was not so poor as it appeared in the search, and that it may therefore happen that yet eftsoon ofter than once, some new sudden searches may have to be made in every house of ours, as narrowly as is possible. Which thing if ever it should so hap, can make but game to us that know the truth of my poverty, but if they find out my wife's gay girdle and her golden beads. Howbeit I verily believe in good faith, that the king's grace of his benign pity will take nothing from her.

I thought and yet think, that it may be that I was shut up again upon some new causeless suspicion, grown peradventure upon some secret sinister information, whereby some folk haply thought that there should be found out against me some other greater thing. But I thank our Lord whensoever this conjecture hath fallen in my mind, the clearness of my conscience hath made mine heart hop for joy. For one thing I am very sure of hitherto, and trust in God's mercy to be while I live, that as I have often said unto

you, I shall, for anything toward my prince, never take great harm but if I take great wrong. In the sight of God I say, howsoever it shall seem in the sight of men. For to the world, wrong may seem right sometime by false conjecturing, sometime by false witnesses: as that good lord said unto you, which is I daresay my very good lord in his mind, and said it of very good will. Before the world also, my refusing of this oath is accounted an heinous offence, and my religious fear toward God, is called obstinacy toward my Prince. But my lords of the Council before whom I refused it, might well perceive by the heaviness of mine heart, appearing well more ways than one unto them, that all sturdy stubbornness whereof obstinacy groweth, was very far from my mind. For the clearer proof whereof, since they seemed to take for one argument of obstinacy in me, that refusing the oath, I would not declare the causes why, I offered with a full heavy heart, that albeit I rather would endure all the pains and peril of the statute, than by the declaring of the causes, give any occasion of exasperation unto my most dread sovereign lord and prince. Yet rather than his highness should for not disclosing the causes, account me for stubborn and obstinate, I would upon such his gracious license and commandment as should discharge me of his displeasure and peril of any statute, declare those points that letted my poor conscience to receive that oath: and would over that be sworn before, that if I should after the causes disclosed and declared, find them so answered as my conscience should think itself satisfied, I would thereupon swear the oath that I there refused.

To this Master Secretary answered me, that though the king's grace gave me such a license, yet it could not discharge me against the statutes, in saying anything that were by them upon heinous pains prohibited. In this good warning he showed himself my special tender friend.

And now you see well, Margaret, that it is none obstinacy to leave the causes undeclared, while I could not declare them without peril. But now is it accounted great obstinacy, that I refuse the oath whatsoever my causes be, considering that of so many wiser and better men, none sticketh thereat. And Master Secretary of a great zeal that he bare unto me, sware there before them a great oath, that for the displeasure that he thought the king's highness would bear me, and the suspicion that his grace would conceive of me, which would now think in his mind that all the nun's business was wrought and devised by me, he had leifer then I should have refused the oath, that his own only son (which is a goodly young gentleman, of whom our Lord send him much joy) had had his head stricken off. This word Margaret, as it was a marvellous declaration of Master Secretary's great good mind and favour towards me, so was it an heavy hearing to me, that the king's grace my most dread sovereign lord, were likely to conceive such high suspicion of me, and bear such grievous indignation toward me, for the thing, which without the danger and peril of my poor soul, lay not in my hand to help, nor doth.

Now have I heard since, that some say that this obstinate manner of mine, in still refusing the

oath, shall peradventure force and drive the king's grace to make a further law for me. I cannot let such a law to be made. But I am very sure that if I died by such a law, I should die for that point innocent before God. And albeit (good daughter) that I think, our Lord that hath the hearts of kings in his hand, would never suffer of his high goodness, so gracious a prince, and so many honourable men as be in the Parliament to make such an unlawful law, as that should be if it so mishapped, yet lest I note that point unthought upon, but many times more than one, resolved and cast in my mind before my coming hither, both that peril and all other that might put my body in peril of death by the refusing of this oath. In devising whereupon, albeit (mine own good daughter) that I found myself (I cry God mercy) very sensual, and my flesh much more shrinking from pain and from death, than methought it the part of a faithful Christian man, in such a case as my conscience gave me, that in the saving of my body should stand the loss of my soul. Yet I thank our Lord, that in that conflict, the spirit had in conclusion the mastery, and reason with help of faith finally concluded, that for to be put to death wrongfully for doing well (as I am very sure I do, in refusing to swear against mine own conscience, being such as I am not upon peril of my soul bound to change whether my death should come without law, or by colour of a law) it is the case in which a man may lose his head and yet have none harm, but instead of harm inestimable good at the hand of God.

And I thank our Lord (Meg) since I am come

hither, I set by death every day less than other. For though a man lose of his years in this world, it is more than manifold recompense by coming the sooner to heaven. And though it be a pain to die while a man is in health, yet see I very few that in sickness die with ease. And finally, very sure am I that whensoever the time shall come that may hap to come, God wot I, soon, in which I should lie sick in my deathbed by nature, I shall then think that God had done much for me, if he had suffered me to die before by the colour of such a law. And therefore my reason showeth me (Margaret) that it were great folly for me to be sorry to come to that death, which I would after wish that I had died. Beside that, that a man may hap with less thank of God, and more adventure of his soul, to die as violently and as painfully by many other chances, as by enemies or thieves.

And therefore mine own good daughter I assure you (thanks be to God) the thinking of any such, albeit it hath grieved me ere this, yet at this day grieveth me nothing. And yet I know well for all this mine own frailty, and that St. Peter which feared it much less than I, fell in such fear soon after, that at the word of a simple girl, he forsook and foresware our Saviour. And therefore am I not (Meg) so mad as to warrant myself to stand. But I shall pray, and I pray thee mine own good daughter to pray with me, that it may please God that hath given me this mind, to give me the grace to keep it.

And thus have I mine own good daughter dis-

closed unto you, the very secret of my mind, referring the order thereof only to the goodness of God, and that so fully, that I assure you Margaret on my faith, I never have prayed God to bring me hence nor deliver me from death, but referred all things whole unto his only pleasure, as to him that seeth better what is best for me than myself doth. Nor never long I, since I came hither, to set my foot in mine own house, for any desire of or pleasure of my house: but gladly would I sometime somewhat talk with my friends, and specially my wife and you that pertain to my charge. But since that God otherwise disposeth, I commit you all wholly to his goodness, and take daily great comfort, in that I perceive you live together so charitably and so quietly: I beseech our Lord continue it. And thus mine own good daughter, putting you finally in remembrance, that albeit if the necessity so should require, I thank our Lord in this quiet and comfort is mine heart at this day, and I trust in God's goodness so shall have grace to continue, yet (as I said before) I verily trust that God shall so inspire and govern the king's heart, that he shall not suffer his noble heart and courage to requite my true faithful heart and service with such extreme unlawful and uncharitable dealing, only for the displeasure that I cannot think so as others do. But his true subject will I live and die, and truly pray for him will I, both here and in the other world too.

And thus mine own good daughter have me recommended to my good bedfellow, and all my chil-

dren, men, women and all, with all your babes and your nurses, and all the maids and all the servants, and all our kin, and all our other friends abroad. And I beseech our Lord to save them all and keep them. And I pray you all pray for me, and I shall pray for you all. And take no thought for me whatsoever you shall hap to hear, but be merry in God.

XIII.

Another letter written and sent by Sir Thomas More (in the year of our Lord 1534. And in the 26 year of King Henry the eight) to his daughter Mistress Roper, answering a letter which she wrote and sent unto him.

The holy spirit of God be with you.

Your daughterly loving letter, my dearly beloved child, was and is I faithfully assure you, much more inward comfort unto me, than my pen can well express you, for divers things that I marked therein: but of all things most especially, for that God of his high goodness giveth you the grace to consider the incomparable difference, between the wretched estate of this present life, and the wealthy state of the life to come, for them that die in God, and to pray God in such a good Christian fashion, that it may please him (it doth me good here to rehearse your own words) " Of

his tender pity to firmly rest our Lord in him, with little regard of this world, and so to flee sin and embrace virtue, that we may with St. Paul, *Mihi vivere Christus, est, et mori lucrum: Et illud, Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo.*"

I beseech our Lord my dearly beloved daughter, this wholesome prayer that he hath put in your mind, it may like him to give your father the grace, daily to remember and pray, and yourself as you have written it, even so daily devoutly to kneel and pray it. For surely if God give us that, he giveth us and will give us therewith, all that ever we can wish. And therefore good Margaret, when you pray it, pray it for us both. And I shall on my part do the like, in such manner as it shall like our Lord to give me poor wretch the grace, that likewise as in this wretched world I have been very glad of your company and you of mine, and yet would if it might be (as natural charity bindeth the father and the child) so we may rejoice and enjoy each others company, with our other kinsfolk allies and friends, everlastingly in the glorious bliss of heaven. And in the meantime, with good counsel and prayer, each help other thitherward. And where you write these words of yourself: "But good father I wretch, am far far farthest of all other from such point of perfection. Our Lord send me the grace to amend my life, and continually have an eye to mine end, without grudge of death, which to them that die in God, is the gate of the wealthy life, to which God of his infinite mercy bring us all Amen. Good father strength my frailty with your devout prayers." The Father of heaven more strength thy frailty, my good

daughter, and the frailty of thy frail father too. And let us not doubt but he so will, if we will not be slack in calling upon him therefor. Of my poor prayers such as they be, ye may be bold to reckon. For Christian charity, and natural love, and your very daughterly dealing, *funiculo triplici* (*qui ut ait scriptura*) *difficile rumpitur*, both bind me and strain me thereto. And of yours I put as little doubt. That you fear your own frailty Marget, nothing misliketh me. God give us both twain the grace, to dispraise of our own self, and hold to depend and hang upon the hope and strength of God. The Blessed apostle St. Paul, found such lack of strength in himself, that in his own temptation he was fain thrice to call and cry out unto God, to take that temptation from him. And yet sped he not of his prayer, in the manner that he required. For God of his high wisdom, seeing that it was (as himself saith) necessary for him to keep him from pride, that else peradventure he might have fallen in, would not at his thrice praying, by and by take it from him, but suffered him to be panged in the pain and fear thereof, giving him yet at the last this comfort against his fear of falling: *Sufficit tibi gratia mea.* By which word as it well seemeth, that the temptation was so strong (whatsoever kind of temptation it was) that he was very feared of falling, through the feebleness of resisting that he began to feel in himself. Whereto for his comfort God answered: *Sufficit tibi gratia mea:* putting him in surety, that were he of himself never so feeble and faint, or never so likely to fall, yet the grace of God was sufficient to keep him up, and make him stand.

And our Lord said further: *Virtus mea in infirmitate perficitur.* The more weak that man is, the more is the strength of God in his safeguard declared. And so St. Paul saith: *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.*

Surely Meg a fainter heart than thy frail father hath, canst thou not have. And yet I verily trust in the great mercy of God, that he shall of his goodness so stay me with his holy hand, that he shall not finally suffer me to fall wretchedly from his favour. And the like trust (dear daughter) in his high goodness, I verily conceive of you. And so much the more, in that there is neither of us both, but that if we call his benefits to mind, and give him oft thanks for them, we may find tokens many, to give us good hope, for all our manifold offences toward him, that his great mercy, when we will heartily call therefor, shall not be withdrawn from us. And verily my dear daughter in this is my great comfort, that albeit I am of nature so shrinking from pain, that I am almost afeared of a philip, yet in all the agonies that I have had, whereof before my coming hither (as I have showed you ere this) I have had neither small nor few, with heavy fearful heart, forecasting all such perils and painful deaths, as by any manner of possibility might after fall unto me, and in such thoughts lyen oft long restless and waking, while my wife had went[1] I had slept, yet any such fear and heavy pensiveness (I thank the mighty mercy of God) I never in my mind intended to consent, that I would, for the enduring of the uttermost, do any such thing, as I should

[1] Thought.

in mine own conscience (for with other men's, I am not a man meet to take upon me to meddle) think to be to myself, such as should damnably cast me in the displeasure of God. And this is the least point that any man may with his salvation come to, as far as I can see, and is bound if he see peril, to examine his conscience surely by learning and good counsel, and be sure that his conscience be such as it may stand with his salvation, or else reform it. And if the matter be such, as both the parties may stand with salvation, then on whether side his conscience fall he is safe enough before God. But that mine own, may stand with mine own salvation, thereof I thank our Lord I am very sure.

I beseech our Lord to bring all parties to his bliss. It is now my good daughter late. And therefore thus I commend you to the holy trinity, to guide you, comfort you, and direct with his holy spirit, and all yours, and my wife, with all my children, and all our other friends,

Thomas More, Knight.

XIV.

A letter written by Sir Thomas More to one Master Leder, a virtuous priest the 16 day of January, in the year of our Lord, 1534.[1] After the computation of the church of England, and in the 26 year of the reign of king Henry the 8.

[1] 1535, by our reckoning.

The tale that is reported, albeit I cannot but thank you though ye would it were true, yet I thank God it is a very vanity. And I trust in the great goodness of God, that he shall never suffer it to be true. If my mind had been obstinate in deed, I would not let for any rebuke or worldly shame, plainly to confess the truth. For I purpose not to depend upon the fame of the world. But I thank our Lord that the thing that I do, is not for obstinacy, but for the salvation of my soul, because I cannot induce mine own mind, otherwise to think than I do concerning the oath. As for other men's consciences I will be no judge of, nor I never advise any man neither to swear nor to refuse, but as for mine own self, if ever I should mishap to receive the oath (which I trust our Lord shall never suffer me) ye may reckon sure that it were expressed and extorted by duress and hard handling. For as for all the good of this world, I thank our Lord I set not much more by, than I do by dust. And I trust both that they will use no violent forcible ways, and also that if they would, God would of his grace (and the rather a great deal through good folks prayers) give me strength to stand. *Fidelis Deus*, saith St. Paul, *qui non patitur vos tentari supra id quod potestis ferre, sed et dat cum tentatione proventum, ut possitis sustinuere*. For this am I very sure, that if ever I should swear it, I should swear deadly sore against mine own conscience. For I am very sure in my mind, that I shall never be able to change mine own conscience to the contrary. As for other men I will not meddle of. It hath been showed me, that I am reckoned wilful and obstinate, because that

since my coming hither, I have not written unto the king's highness, and by mine own writing made some suit unto his grace. But in good faith I do not forbear it of any obstinacy, but rather of a lowly mind and a reverent, because that I see nothing that I could write, but that I fear me sore, that his grace were likely rather to take displeasure with me for it than otherwise, while his grace believeth me not that my conscience is the cause, but rather obstinate wilfulness. But surely that my lette[1] is but my conscience, that knoweth God, to whose order I commit the whole matter, *in cujus manu corda regis sunt.* I beseech our Lord that all may prove as true faithful subjects of the king that have sworn, as I am in my mind very sure, that they be which have refused to swear. In haste this Saturday the 16 day of January. By the hand of your bedesman

Thomas More, Knight, prisoner.

XV.

A letter written and sent by Sir Thomas More to his daughter Mistress Roper, written the second or third day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1535. And in the 27 year of the reign of king Henry the eight.

Our Lord bless you.

My dearly beloved daughter, I doubt not but by the reason of the king's Councillors resorting hither,

[1] Hindrance.

in this time in which (our Lord be their comfort) these fathers of the Charterhouse and Master Reynolds of Sion, be now judged to death for treason (whose matters and causes I know not) may hap to put you in trouble and fear of mind, concerning me being here prisoner, specially for that it is not unlikely, that you have heard that I was brought also before the Council here myself.

I have thought it necessary to advertise you of the very truth, to the end that you should neither conceive more hope than the matter giveth, lest upon another turn it might aggrieve your heaviness: nor more grief and fear than the matter giveth, on the other side. Wherefore shortly ye shall understand, that on Friday the last day of April in the afternoon, Master Lieutenant came in here unto me, and showed me that Master Secretary would speak with me. Whereupon I shifted my gown, and went out with Master Lieutenant into the gallery to him, where I met many, some known and some unknown in the world. And in conclusion coming into the chamber where his mastership sat, with Master Attorney, Master Solicitor, Master Bedyll and Master doctor Tregonwell, I was offered to sit down with them, which in no wise I would.

Whereupon Master Secretary showed unto me, that he doubted not, but that I had by such friends as hither had resorted to me, seen the new statutes made at the last sitting of the Parliament. Whereunto I answered, "Yea verily." Howbeit forasmuch as being here, I have no conversation with any people, I thought it little need

for me to bestow much time upon them, and therefore I redelivered the book shortly, and the effect of the statutes I never marked nor studied to put in remembrance. Then he asked me whether I had not read the first statute of them, of the King being head of the church. Whereupon I answered, "Yea." Then his Mastership declared unto me, that since it was now by act of Parliament ordained, that his highness and his heirs be, and ever of right have been, and perpetually should be, supreme head in earth of the church of England under Christ, the king's pleasure was, that those of his Council there assembled, should demand mine opinion and what my mind was therein.

Whereunto I answered, that in good faith I had well trusted, that the king's highness would never have commanded any such question to be demanded of me, considering that I ever from the beginning, well and truly from time to time declared my mind unto his highness. And since that time (I said) unto your mastership, Master Secretary, also, both by mouth and by writing. And now I have in good faith discharged my mind of all such matters, and neither will dispute king's titles nor pope's. But the king's true faithful subject I am, and will be, and daily I pray for him, and all his, and for you all that are of his honourable Council, and for all the realm. And otherwise than this, I never intend to meddle.

Whereunto Master Secretary answered, that he thought this manner of answer should not satisfy nor content the king's highness, but that his grace would exact a more full answer. And his mastership added thereunto, that the king's highness was

a prince, not of rigour, but of mercy and pity. And though that he had found obstinacy at some time in any of his subjects, yet when he should find them at another time conformable and submit themself, his grace would show mercy. And that concerning myself, his highness would be glad to see me take such conformable ways, as I might be abroad in the world again among other men as I had been before.

Whereunto I shortly (after the inward affection of my mind) answered for a very truth, that I would never meddle in the world again, to have the world given me. And to the remnant of the matter, I answered in effect as before, showing that I had fully determined with myself, neither to study nor meddle with any matter of this world, but that my whole study should be, upon the passion of Christ and mine own passage out of this world.

Upon this I was commanded to go forth for a while, and after called in again.

At which time Master Secretary said unto me, that though I were a prisoner condemned to perpetual prison, yet I was not thereby discharged of mine obedience and allegiance unto the king's highness. And thereupon demanded me, whether that I thought, that the king's grace might not exact of me such things as are contained in the statute, and upon like pains as he might upon other men.

Whereto I answered that I would not say the contrary.

Whereunto he said, that likewise as the king's highness would be gracious to them that he found

conformable, so his grace would follow the course of his laws toward such as he shall find obstinate. And his Mastership said further, that my demeanour in that matter was a thing that of likelihood made others so stiff therein as they be.

Whereto I answered, that I give no man occasion to hold any point one or other, nor never gave any man advice or counsel therein one way or other. And for conclusion I could no farther go, whatsoever pains should come thereof. I am (quod I) the king's true faithful subject and daily bedesman, and pray for his highness and all his and all the realm. I do nobody no harm, I say none harm, I think none harm, but wish everybody good. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive, in good faith I long not to live. And I am dying already, and have since I came here, been divers times in the case that I thought to die within one hour. And I thank our Lord I was never sorry for it, but rather sorry when I saw the pang past. And therefore my poor body is at the king's pleasure. Would God my death might do him good.

After this Master Secretary said, "Well, ye find no fault in that statute: find you any in any of the other statutes after?"

Whereto I answered, "Sir, whatsoever thing that should seem to me other than good, in any of the other statutes or in that statute either, I would not declare what fault I found, nor speak thereof."

Whereunto finally his Mastership said full gently, that if anything I had spoken, there should none advantage be taken. And whether he said farther that there was none to be taken, I am not well remembered.

But he said that report should be made unto the king's highness, and his gracious pleasure known.

Whereupon I was delivered to Master Lieutenant which was then called in. And so I was by Master Lieutenant brought again into my chamber. And here am I yet in such case as I was, neither better nor worse. That that shall follow lieth in the hand of God, whom I beseech to put in the king's gracious mind that thing that may be to his high pleasure, and in mine, to mind only the weal of my soul, with little regard of my body, and you with all yours, and my wife and all my children, and all our other friends both bodily and ghostly heartily well to fare. And I pray you and them all pray for me, and take no thought whatsoever shall happen me. For I verily trust in the goodness of God seemeth never so evil to this world, shall indeed in another be for the best.

Your loving father, Thomas More, Knight.

XVI.

Another letter written and sent by Sir Thomas More to his daughter Mistress Roper, written in the year of our Lord, 1535. And in the 27 year of king Henry 8.

Our Lord bless you and all yours.

Forasmuch (dearly beloved daughter) as it is likely, that you either have heard or shortly shall

hear, that the Council were here this day and that I was before them, I have thought it necessary to send you word how the matter standeth. And verily to be short I perceive little difference between this time and the last. For as far as I can see, the whole purpose is, either to drive me to say precisely the one way, or else precisely the other. Here sat my lord of Canterbury, my lord Chancellor, my lord of Suffolk, my lord of Wilshyre, and Master Secretary. And after my coming, Master Secretary made rehearsal in what wise he had reported unto the king's highness, what had been said by his grace's Council to me, and what had been answered by me to them, at mine other being before them here last. Which thing his Mastership rehearsed in good faith very well, as I acknowledged and confessed, and heartily thanked him therefore. Whereupon he added thereunto, that the king's highness was nothing content nor satisfied with mine answer: but thought that by my demeanour, I had been occasion of much grudge and harm in the realm, and that I had an obstinate mind and an evil toward him, and that my duty was being his subject (as so he had sent them now in his name upon mine allegiance to command me) to make a plain and a terminate answer, whether I thought the statute lawful or not. And that I should either knowledge and confess it lawful, that his highness should be supreme head of the church of England, or else utter plainly my malignity. Whereto I answered, that I had no malignity, and therefore I could none utter. And as to the matter I could none other answer make, than I had before made, which answer his Mastership had there

rehearsed. Very heavy was I that the king's highness should have any such opinion of me. Howbeit if there were one that had informed his highness many evil things of me that were untrue, to which his highness for the time gave credence I would be very sorry that he should have that opinion of me the space of one day. Howbeit if I were sure that other should come on the morrow by whom his grace should know the truth of mine innocency, I should in the meanwhile comfort myself with consideration of that. And in likewise now, though it be great heaviness to me, that his highness hath such opinion of me for the while, yet have I no remedy to help it, but only to comfort myself with this consideration, that I know very well that the time shall come, when God shall declare my truth toward his grace, before him and all the world. And whereas it might haply seem to be but small cause of comfort, because I might take harm here first in the meanwhile, I thanked God that my case was such here in this matter, through the clearness of mine own conscience, that though I might have pain, I could not have harm. For a man may in such a case lose his head and have none harm. For I was very sure, that I had no corrupt affection, but that I had always from the beginning truly used myself, looking first upon God, and next upon the king, according to the lesson that his highness taught me at my first coming to his noble service, the most virtuous that ever prince taught his servant. whose highness to have of me now such opinion, is my great heaviness. But I have no mean as I said to help it, but only comfort myself in the meantime with the

hope of that joyful day, in which my truth toward him shall well be known. And in this matter further I could not go, nor other answer thereto I could not make. To this it was said by my lord Chancellor and Master Secretary both, that the king might by his laws compel me to make a plain answer thereto, either the one way or the other. Whereto I answered that I would not dispute the king's authority, what his highness might do in such a case. But I said that verily under correction, it seemed to me somewhat hard. For if it so were that my conscience gave me against the statute (wherein how my conscience giveth me I make no declaration) then I nothing nor nothing saying against the statute it were a very hard thing, to compel me to say, either precisely with it against my conscience to the loss of my soul, or precisely against it to the destruction of my body. To this Master Secretary said, that I had ere this when I was Chancellor, examined heretics and thieves and other malefactors, and gave me a great praise above my deserving in that behalf. And he said that I then as he thought, and at the leastwise bishops, did use to examine heretics, whether they believed the Pope to be head of the church, and used to compel them to make a precise answer thereto. And why should not then the king, since it is a law made here that his grace is head of the church here, compel me to answer precisely to the law here, as they did then concerning the pope. I answered and said, that I protested that I intended not to defend my part, or stand in contention. But I said there was a difference between those two cases, because that at that time, as well

here as elsewhere through the corps of Christendom, the Pope's power was recognised for an undoubted thing: which seemeth not like a thing agreed in this realm, and the contrary taken for truth in other realms. Whereto Master Secretary answered, that they were as well burned for the denying of that, as they be beheaded for the denying of this: And therefore as good reason to compel them to make precise answer to the one, as to the other. Whereto I answered, that since in this case a man is not by a law of one realm so bound in his conscience, where there is a law of the whole corps of Christendom to the contrary in matter touching belief, as he is by a law of the whole corps, though there hap to be made in some place a law local to the contrary, the reasonableness or the unreasonableness in binding a man to precise answer, standeth not in the respect or difference between heading and burning: but because of the difference in change of conscience, the difference standeth between heading and hell. Much was there answered unto this, both by Master Secretary and my lord Chancellor, overlong to rehearse. And in conclusion they offered me an oath, by which I should be sworn to make true answer to such things as should be asked of me on the king's behalf concerning the king's own person. Whereto I answered, that verily I never purposed to swear any book oath more while I lived. Then they said that I was very obstinate if I would refuse that, for every man doth it in the Star Chamber and everywhere. I said that was true: but I had not so little foresight, but that I might well conjecture what should be part of mine

interrogatories: and as good it was to refuse them at the first, as afterwards. Whereto my lord Chancellor answered that he thought I guessed truth, for I should see them. And so they were showed me, and they were but twain: the first, whether I had seen the statute: the other, whether I believed that it were a lawful made statute or not. Whereupon I refused the oath, and said further by mouth, that the first I had before confessed: and to the second I would make none answer: which was the end of our communication, and I was thereupon sent away. In the communication before, it was said that it was marvelled, that I stuck so much in my conscience, while at the uttermost I was not sure therein. Whereto I said, that I was very sure, that mine own conscience so informed as it is, by such diligence as I have so long taken therein, may stand with mine own salvation. I meddle not with the conscience of them that think otherwise. Every man *suo damno stat aut cadit*. I am not man's judge. It was also said unto me, that if I had as lief be out of the world as in it, as I had there said, why did I not then speak even plain out against the statute? It appeared well that I was not content to die, though I said so. Whereto I answered as the truth is, that I have not been a man of such holy living, as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God for my presumption might suffer me to fall: and therefore I put not myself forward but draw back. Howbeit if God draw me to it himself, then trust I in his great mercy, that he shall not fail to give me grace and strength. In conclusion Master Secretary said that he liked me this day much worse

than he did the last time. For then he said he pitied me much, and now he thought I meant not well. But God and I know both, that I mean well, and so I pray God do by me. I pray you be you and mine other good friends of good cheer whatsoever fall of me, and take no thought for me, but pray for me, as I do and shall for you and all them.

Your tender loving father Thomas More Knight.

XVII.

Sir Thomas More a little before he was arraigned and condemned (in the year of our Lord 1535.[1] And in the xxvii year of the reign of king Henry the eight) being shut up so close in prison in the Tower that he had no pen nor ink, wrote with a cole[2] a pistle in Latin to Master Anthony Bonvisi (marchant of Luke and then dwelling in London) his old and dear friend, and sent it unto him the copye whereof here followeth.

A translation from the original Latin.

Good Master Bonvisi of all friends most friendliest, and to me worthily dearliest beloved, I heartily greet you. Since my mind doth give me (and yet may chance falsely) but yet so it doth, that I shall not

[1] For the account of More's trial in Westminster Hall, see Roper's *Life* (Scott Library), pp. 51 sqq.

[2] Coal.

have long liberty to write unto you, I determined therefore while I may, to declare unto you by this little epistle of mine, how much I am comforted with the sweetness of your friendship, in this decay of my fortune.

For afore (right worshipful sir) although I alway delighted marvellously in this your love towards me, yet when I consider in my mind, that I have been now almost this forty years, not a guest, but a continual nurseling in Master Bonvisi's house, and in the mean season have not showed myself in requiting you again, a friend, but a barren lover only, my shamefastness verily made, that that sincere sweetness, which otherwise I received of the revolving of your friendship, somewhat wared sourish, by reason of a certain rustical shame as neglecting of my duty toward you. But now I comfort myself with this that I never had the occasion to do you pleasure. For such was always your great wealth, that there was nothing left, in which I might be unto you beneficial. I therefore (knowing that I have not been unthankful to you by omitting my duty toward you, but for lack of occasion and opportunity, and seeing moreover all hope of recompense taken away, you so to persevere in love toward me, binding me more and more to you, yea rather so to run forward still, and as it were with a certain indefatigable course to go forth, that few men so fawn upon their fortunate friends, as you favour, love, foster and honour me, now overthrown, abjected, afflicted, and condemned to prison) cleanse myself both from this bitterness (such as it is) of mine old shamefastness, and also repose myself in the sweetness of

this marvellous friendship of yours. And this faithful prosperity of this amity and friendship of yours towards me (I wot not how) seemeth in a manner to counterpoise this unfortunate shipwreck of mine, and saving the indignation of my Prince, of me no less loved than feared, else as concerning all other things doth almost more them counterpoise. For all those are to be accounted amongst the mischances of fortune.

But if I should reckon the possession of so constant friendship (which no storms of adversity have taken away, but rather hath fortified and strengthened) amongst the brittle gifts of fortune, then were I mad. For the felicity of so faithful and constant a friendship in the storms of fortune (which is seldom seen) is doubtless a high and a noble gift proceeding of a certain singular benignity of God.

And indeed as concerning myself, I cannot otherwise take it nor reckon it, but that it was ordained by the great mercy of God, that you good Master Bonvisi amongst my poor friends, such a man as you are and so great a friend, should be long afore provided, that should by your consolation, assuage and relieve a great part of these troubles and griefs of mine, which the hugeness of fortune hath hastily brought upon me.

I therefore my dear friend and of all mortal men to me most dearest, do (which now only I am able to do) earnestly pray to Almighty God, which have provided you for me, that since he hath given you such a debtor as shall never be able to pay you, that it shall please him of his benignity, to requite this bountifulness of yours which you every day thus plenteously pour upon me. And that for his mercy sake he will bring us

from this wretched and stormy world, into his rest, where shall need no letters, where no walls shall dissever us, where no porter shall keep us from talking together, but that we may have the fruition of the eternal joy with God the Father, and with his only begotten son our Redeemer Jesus Christ, with the holy Spirit of them both, the holy ghost proceeding from them both. And in the mean season, almighty God grant both you and me good Master Bonvisi and all mortal men everywhere, to set at nought all the riches of this world, with all the glory of it, and the pleasure of this life also, for the love and desire of that joy. Thus of all friends most trusty, and to me most dearly beloved, and as I was wont to call you the apple of mine eye, right heartily fare ye well. And Jesus Christ keep safe and sound and in good health, all your family, which be of like affection toward me as their master is.

Thomas More: I should in vain put to it, yours, for thereof can you not be ignorant, since you have bought it with so many benefits. Nor now I am not such a one that it forceth whose I am.

XVIII.

Sir Thomas More was beheaded at the Tower Hill in London on Tuesday the sixth day of July in the year of our Lord 1535. And in the xxvii year of the reign of king Henry the eight. And on the day next before, being Monday and the fifth day of July, he wrote with a cole a letter to his daughter Mistress

Roper, and sent it to her, (which was the last thing that ever he wrote) the copy whereof here followeth.

Our Lord bless you good daughter, and your good husband, and your little boy, and all yours, and all my children, and all my God-children, and all our friends. Recommend me when you may to my good daughter Cicily, whom I beseech our Lord to comfort. And I send her my blessing, and to all her children, and pray her to pray for me. I send her an handkercher: And God comfort my good son her husband. My good daughter Daunce hath the picture in parchment, that you delivered me from my lady Coniers, the name is on the back side. Show her that I heartily pray her, that you may send it in my name to her again, for a token from me to pray for me. I like special well Dorothy Coly, I pray you be good unto her. I would wit whether this be she you wrote me of. If not I pray you be good to the other, as you may in her affliction, and to my good daughter Joane Aleyn too. Give her I pray you some kind answer, for she sued hither to me this day to pray you be good to her.

I cumber you good Margaret much, but I would be sorry if it should be any longer than to-morrow. For it is St. Thomas's even, and the utas (octave) of St. Peter: and therefore to-morrow long I to go to God: it were a day very mete and convenient to me.

I never liked your manner toward me better, than when you kissed me last. For I love when daughterly love and dear charity, hath no leisure to look to worldly courtesy.

Farewell my dear child, and pray for me, and I shall for you and all your friends, that we may merrily meet in heaven. I thank you for your great cost. I send now to my good daughter Clement her algorisme stone, and I send her and my godson and all here God's blessing and mine. I pray you at time convenient recommend me to my good son John More. I like well his natural fashion. Our Lord bless him and his good wife my loving daughter, to whom I pray him be good as he hath great cause: and that if the land of mine come to his hand, he break not my will concerning his sister Daunce. And our Lord bless Thomas and Austin and all that they shall have.

THUS ENDETH
THESE LAST LETTERS
OF BLESSED SIR THOMAS MORE

INDEX

Abell, *Blessed* **Thomas**, *Martyr*, 29.
Æsop, 62.
Aleyn, Joan, 118.
Alington, Alice, *Lady*, step-daughter of Bl. Thos. More, 51, 54, 56, 58, 79.
Alington, *Sir* **Giles**, 51, 58.
Ambrose, *Saint*, 84.
Audeley, Thomas, Lord Chancellor, 22, 42, 51, 57, 59-63, 109, 111-113.
Augustine, *Saint*, viii., 84.

Barneston, *Sir* **Thomas**, 51.
Barton, *Dame* **Elizabeth**, the Holy Maid of Kent, 4, 6-8, 16, 59, 93.
Bartholomew Fair, 65.
Basil, *Saint*, 84.
Bedyll, Thomas, clerk of the Council, 104.
Boethius, 62.
Boleyn, *Queen* **Anne**, xii., xviii.
Bonvisi, Antonio, Merchant of Lucca, 114-117.
Brewer, J. S., xii.
Buckingham, Edward Stafford, *3rd Duke*, 12.
Burgo, Niccola de, D.D., O.F.M., 28.

Carthusian Martyrs, 104.
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 75.
Clement VII., Pope, xi., 33.
Clements, Margaret (*née* Gigs, ward of Bl. Thos. More), 119.
Clerk, John, Bishop of Bath, 1523—1549, 29.
Colet, John, Dean of St. Paul's, viii.
Coly, Dorothy, 118.
Conscience, its Supremacy over law and public opinion, 65-69, 71-72.
Conyers, Anne, *Baroness*, 118.
Councils, General, authority of, 32, 33, 69-71.
Cranmer, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1533—1555, 22, 28, 40, 43, 109.
Cromwell, Gregory, son of Thomas Cromwell, 93.
Cromwell, Thomas, Secretary of State and Master of the Rolls, xviii., 1, 4, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 41, 42, 45, 59, 76, 93, 104-107.
Croydon, Vicar of, 36, 38.

Daunce, Elizabeth, 2nd daughter of Bl. Thomas More, 118, 119.

Erasmus, Desiderius, viii.

Fables and tales, 52, 53, 64-67.
Fisher, John, Cardinal Bishop of Rochester, 1504—1535, 38, 52, 63.
Foxe, Edward, Bishop of Hereford, 1535—1538, Almoner to the King, 26, 28.
François I., King of France, 59.

Gairdner, James, x.
Gregory, *Saint*, 84.
Grocyn, William, Master of All Saints College, Maidstone, 1506—1522, viii.

Hales, *Sir* **Christopher,** Attorney General, 104.
Harris, John, Secretary to Bl. Thos. More, 45.
Henry VIII., King of England, xx., xi., 5, 6, 7, 22, 60, 72, 77, 78, 82, 83, 85, 92, 94, 96, 105-108, 116, 117.
Heron, Cecilia, 3rd daughter of Bl. Thos. More, 118.
Heron, Giles, 118.

Immaculate Conception, Feast of the, 70.

Jerome, *Saint,* 84.
John Chrysostom, *Saint,* 84.
Johnson, Samuel, LL.D., ix.

Latimer, Hugh, Bishop of Worcester, 1535—1539, 38.
Law, its subordination to conscience, 69.
Leder, a priest, 101-103.
Lee, Edward, Archbishop of York, 1531—1544, 28.
Linacre, Thomas, M.D., vii.
Luther, Martin, O.S.A., x., 31.

Maxmilian I., Emperor, 59.
More, Alice, *Lady,* second wife of Bl. Thos. More, 45, 51, 55, 77, 89, 96, 100, 108.
More, Anne, wife of John More, 119.
More, Austin, son of John More, 119.
More, John, son of Bl. Thos. More, 57, 119.
More, *Blessed Sir* **Thomas,** *Martyr;* his writings deliberately neglected, vii.; English works published, 1557, vii., xvii.; lectures on St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei,* viii.; learns Greek from Linacre, viii.; Chancellor of England, 1529—1532, 27; resigns the Lord Chancellorship, May, 1532, xviii.; refuses to attend coronation of Anne Boleyn, June, 1533, xviii.; suspected of inspiring Rastell's pamphlet, xviii-4; writes a book against an unknown heretic who attacked the Blessed Sacrament, 1, 2; his loyalty to Henry VIII., 3, 6, 7, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 59, 96; his dealings with Elizabeth Barton, 4, 5, 8-11, 13, 14, 15; his interviews with Friars Rich and Risby, 6, 7, 8, 15; his name in Bill of Attainder, 21st Feb., 1534, 17; summoned before a Committee of the Council, March, 1534, 22; his opinions on the King's marriage, 25-30; his opinions on Papal Supremacy, 30-33, 35; summoned to Lambeth to take the oath, 13th April, 1534, 35, 36; refuses to judge other men's consciences, 37, 75, 80, 87; refuses to take the oath of Succession, 37-42; committed to the Tower, 17th April, 1534, 43; rejects his daughter's plea for reconsideration of the oath, 46; suffers from various diseases, 54; his long study of the disputed questions, 56; his detachment from the world, 68; he appeals to the testimony of Christendom, 74; is examined in prison, 104; is again interrogated in the Tower, 7th May, 1535, 109-114; his friendship with Antonio Bonvisi, 114-117; is beheaded on Tower Hill, 6th July, 1535, 117.

More, Thomas, son of John More, 119.

Norfolk, Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke, 22.

Papal Supremacy, 30, 31, 32.
Patenson, Henry, fool to Bl. Thos. More, 76.
Paul, *Saint*, 84, 98, 99, 100. 103.
Peter, *Saint*, 79, 95.
Pie-Powder, Court of, 64.
Pounder, *Sir* William, 65.
Privy Council, xviii., 1, 3, 21.

Rastell, William, nephew of Bl. Thos. More, vii., xviii.
Reynolds, *Blessed* **Richard,** O.SS.S., *Martyr*, 104.
Rich, Hugh, O.F.M., Warden of Richmond, 7, 8, 15.
Rich, *Sir* **Richard,** Solicitor General, 104.
Risby, Richard, O.F.M., Warden of Canterbury, 6.
Roper, Margaret, eldest daughter of Bl. Thos. More, 43-119.
Roper, Thomas, son of William Roper, 118.
Roper, William, 4, 23, 35, 43, 45, 118.

Sheen Charterhouse, its prior consults Bl. Thos. More, 13.
Sion, Brigettine Monastery, 9.
Southwell, *Sir* **Richard,** 43.
Suffolk, Charles Brandon, Duke of, 109.

Tregonwell, Doctor, 104.
Tunstall, Cuthbert, Bishop of Durham, 1530—1559, 27.

Walsingham, *Sir* **Edward,** Lieutenant of the Tower, 43, 104, 108.
Warham, William, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1503—1532, 5.
Westminster, Abbot of, 36, 41.
Williams, *Brother*, O. Cart., 13.
Wilson, Nicholas, D.D., 38, 86-88.
Wiltshire, Thomas Boleyn, Earl of, 109.
Wolsey, Thomas, Cardinal Archbishop of York, 1514—1530, 5, 6, 27, 59, 60.
Wood, John à, servant to Bl. Thos. More, 49.

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